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by Arthur C. Clarke

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JUNE 1958

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IF is published bi-monthly by Quinn Publishing Co., Inc. Vol. 8, No. 4. Copyright 1958 by Quinn Publishing Co., Inc. Office of publication 8 Lord Street, Buffalo, N.Y. Entered as Second Class Matter at Post Office, Buffalo, N.Y. Subscription \$3.50 for 12 issues in U.S. and Possessions; Canada \$4 for 12 issues; elsewhere \$4.50. All stories are fiction; any similarity to actual persons is coincidental. Not responsible for unsolicited artwork or manuscripts. 35c a copy. Printed in U.S.A.

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES, KINGSTON, NEW YORK

Next (August) issue on sale June 12th



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Editor's REPORT

In the October issue we asked readers to write us something about themselves, what they do for a living, what they do for fun, why they read science fiction, and anything else they cared to mention. So far we have heard from 42 states, Canada and the West Indies—enough of what might normally be called statistics to provide sort of a “cross-section” survey of what the readers of IF do and think. Some readers answered all kinds of questions (some we’d never even have thought to ask); others were not quite so communicative. For instance, one gentleman wrote us simply that “I buy IF because there is a certain amount of dignity to the covers.” From this letter we could “statistic” only two things: the writer was male and he hailed from the state of Washington. However, we had fun, we hope you do, and while we can not undertake to answer every letter, we’d like to thank all those who wrote us and made this survey so interesting.

Of all letters received, 69% were male, with the remaining 31% surprisingly high (at least to us) for the distaff side. Of the female contingent, 66% were single; of the married 34%, half were mothers with an average of two children each. (I’m glad it came out an even two. Statistics that say $43\frac{3}{4}$ men, $38\frac{1}{4}$ women or $14\frac{1}{3}$ children bother me!) Of those who mentioned their occupations, 66% were employed, 17% were students and the remaining 17% were making a full time job of being a housewife. Those steadily employed and mentioning their jobs listed the following: engineer (electrical and chemical), salesman, teacher, doctor, clerk, meteorologist, nurse, professor, photographer, writer, army (all ranks). The most mentioned hobbies were: photography, music (jazz and otherwise), amateur astronomy, sports (indoors and outdoors), collecting science fiction books and magazines, stamps, drawing and painting, chess and home do-it-yourself (carpentry, plumbing, repairs, etc.). One young lady wrote that her hobby was mental telepathy. A young man at a mid-western high school said, “my favorite sport is swimming and secondly girl watching (this is a popular sport at M. C. H. S. and I am on the varsity)”.

The most frequently mentioned authors were Asimov, Russell, Heinlein, van Vogt, Sheckley, Sturgeon, Bradbury, Simak, Blish, Andersen, Brown, Clarke, Jones, Phillips, Godwin and Leinster. Artists most frequently named were Finlay, Emsh, Hunter, Freas and Orban.

And what was the average age of IF readers? Well, folks just didn't give out too generously with that statistic. However, 20% of the men did and 10% of the ladies didn't seem to mind. And here is what we came up with: average age of all readers reporting such was 26.3 years; the youngest was 12 years old, and the senior IF reader has counted 71 summers. One young man wrote that he was 15 years old and still single!

When we asked Jimmie Gunn (*Hoax, Powder Keg, Green Thumb*, etc.) what life was like out thar in Kansas, he replied that it was "fantastically normal". The Gunns—Christopher, age 8, Kevin, age 4, wife Jane and Jimmie—live in a three-year-old ranch house about a mile from the University of Kansas campus, where he is managing editor of University of Kansas Alumni Publications.

Of all science fiction writers, Jimmie Gunn's family seems to be the one most steeped in the tradition of printers ink. Instead of the proverbial spoon of sorts, he must have been born with a printer's measure in his mouth and a couple fists full of type. Furthermore, his parents must have given him a typewriter, instead of a teddy bear, to snuggle up with when he was tucked in for the night. And I suppose it would have been quite natural considering. His father is a printer; two of his uncles are pressmen, and a third is a proofreader. His grandfather was a country editor.

Born July 12, 1923, Jimmie breezed through grade and high

school and graduated from the University of Kansas with a B. S. in journalism. After three years in the navy during World War II, he studied speech and drama at Northwestern U., and got his M. A. in English in 1951. But his write-for-pay career, however, started before he had finished his schooling. In 1947, he wrote a full length play which was produced at the University and followed this with features and scripts for local newspapers and radio. During 1948 he wrote his first 10 science fiction stories and sold nine of them—all under the pen-name of "Edwin James". A little later, his masters thesis, a critical analysis of science fiction, was the only one ever published in a professional science fiction magazine. To date, Jimmie has sold over fifty short stories and has published two novels. Throughout all his writing, his philosophy has been that every serious story should contain some element which makes the reader proud he belongs to the human race—even tragedy must lead to redemption. His space stories, in which you will find strong evidence of this philosophy (including *Hoax* and *Powder Keg*), will be published in book form this spring.

Russ Winterbotham reports that he's the man responsible for the science fiction strip, *Chris Welkin*, which appears in 40 newspapers and is translated into Spanish for Latin American consumption. He also writes westerns, but his regular job is fiction editor for the Scripps-Howard NEA news service. Obvi-

ously, Russ not only works at writing, but makes it his hobby too . . . If you're an inveterate sidewalk superintendent, make tracks for Montreal. One of the most spectacular and complicated engineering jobs ever attempted is going on at the Jacques Cartier Bridge. Thirty hydraulic jacks are being used to raise the spans 60 to 120 feet for the St. Lawrence Seaway project—and the flow of traffic over the bridge isn't even interrupted! . . . Not so long ago Dr. Lawrence S. Dillon, associate professor of biology at Texas A and M, voiced a new theory regarding the origination of Mankind: the possibility that Man is a member of the vegetable kingdom instead of the animal. Which lends the thought (among others) that our ancestors might have been more attractive as trees than the monkeys hanging by their tails amongst their branches . . . One of science fiction's most published artists, Virgil Finlay, considers himself more of a gallery painter than an illustrator, even after 23 years. He has appeared in various museums, including the famed Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and the noted Memorial Gallery in Rochester . . . Bertram Chandler (*Maze, Bureau-*

crat, Gift Horse, etc.) is a ship's officer on the Australian Sidney-to-Hobart run . . . Bob Silverberg's *The Walls Came Tumbling Down* (December IF) will be published in paperback format this spring. He has expanded it into a novel which will carry the byline of "David Osborne". Bob's latest, an exciting novelette titled *The Wages of Death*, will appear in the August issue of IF . . . *The Day of the Dog* (page 66), an eerie piece of story telling, is by a young lady whose full-time job is boat editor of a Florida newspaper . . . In *The Songs of Distant Earth* you'll find that Arthur C. Clarke can blend a charming love theme with a fascinating science fiction story . . . David Bunch (*Routine Emergency*) is a Federal employee at the Aeronautical Chart and Information Center in St. Louis. A graduate of Washington University of St. Louis, with an M. A. in English, his published experience, before IF, was confined to the literary quarterlies. Or, as he puts it, "the pay-in-glory-or-something magazines" . . . And if you think *High Dragon Bump* (page 101) is a wide one in phonetics—wel, just start a conversation with any three or four year old youngster!

—jlg



Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

THE SONGS OF

BY ARTHUR C. CLARKE

*The Star Ship Magellan brought Earthmen to Thalassa for the
first time in three hundred years! They came by
accident, to syphon the waters of the sea. Thus, this story
of how Leon of Earth met Lora of Thalassa . . .*

BENEATH the palm trees Lora waited, watching the sea. Clyde's boat was already visible as a tiny notch on the far horizon—the only flaw in the perfect mating of sea and sky. Minute by minute it grew in size, until it had detached itself from the featureless blue globe that encompassed the world. Now she could see Clyde standing at the prow, one hand twined around the rigging, statue-still as his eyes sought her among the shadows.

"Where are you, Lora?" his voice asked plaintively from the radio-bracelet he had given her when they

became engaged. "Come and help me—we've got a big catch to bring home."

So! Lora told herself; *that's* why you asked me to hurry down to the beach. Just to punish Clyde and to reduce him to the right state of anxiety, she ignored his call until he had repeated it half a dozen times. Even then she did not press the beautiful golden pearl set in the "Transmit" button, but slowly emerged from the shade of the great trees and walked down the sloping beach.

Clyde looked at her reproach-

DISTANT EARTH

fully, but gave her a satisfactory kiss as soon as he had bounded ashore and secured the boat. Then they started unloading the catch together, scooping fish large and small from both hulls of the catamaran. Lora screwed up her nose but assisted gamely, until the waiting sand-sled was piled high with the victim's of Clyde's skill.

It was a good catch; when she married Clyde, Lora told herself proudly, she'd never starve. The clumsy, armored creatures of this young planet's sea were not true fish; it would be a hundred million years before Nature invented scales here. But they were good enough eating, and the first colonists had labelled them with names they had brought, with so many other traditions, from unforgotten Earth.

"That's the lot!" grunted Clyde, tossing a fair imitation of a salmon on to the glistening heap. "I'll fix the nets later—let's go!"

Finding a foot-hold with some difficulty, Lora jumped on to the sled behind him. The flexible rollers spun for a moment against the sand, then got a grip. Clyde, Lora and a hundred pounds of assorted fish starting racing up the wave-scalloped beach. They had made half the brief journey when the simple, carefree world they had known all their young lives came suddenly to its end.

The sign of its passing was written there upon the sky, as if a giant hand had drawn a piece of chalk across the blue vault of heaven. Even as Clyde and Lora watched, the gleaming vapor trail began to fray at its edges, breaking up into

wisps of cloud.

And now they could hear, falling down through the miles above their heads, a sound their world had not known for generations. Instinctively they grasped each other's hands, as they stared at that snow-white furrow across the sky and listened to the thin scream from the borders of space. The descending ship had already vanished beyond the horizon before they turned to each other and breathed, almost with reverence, the same magic word: "Earth!"

After three hundred years of silence, the mother world had reached out once more to touch Thalassa . . .

Why? Lora asked herself, when the long moment of revelation had passed and the scream of torn air ceased to echo from the sky. What had happened, after all these years, to bring a ship from mighty Earth to this quiet and contented world? There was no room for more colonists here on this one island in a watery planet, and Earth knew that well enough. Its robot survey ships had mapped and probed Thalassa from space five centuries ago, in the early days of interstellar exploration. Long before Man himself had ventured out into the gulfs between the stars, his electronic servants had gone ahead of him, circling the worlds of alien suns and heading homewards with their store of knowledge, as bees bring honey back to the parent hive.

Such a scout had found Thalassa, a freak among worlds with its single large island in a shoreless sea. One day continents would be born

here, but this was a new planet, its history still waiting to be written.

The robot had taken a hundred years to make its homeward journey, and for a hundred more its garnered knowledge had slept in the electronic memories of the great computers which stored the wisdom of Earth. The first waves of colonization had not touched Thalassa; there were more profitable worlds to be developed—worlds which were not nine-tenths water. Yet at last the pioneers had come; only a dozen miles from where she was standing now, Lora's ancestors had first set foot upon this planet and claimed it for Mankind.

They had levelled hills, planted crops, moved rivers, built towns and factories, and multiplied until they reached the natural limits of their land. With its fertile soil, abundant seas and mild, wholly predictable weather, Thalassa was not a world which demanded much of its adopted children. The pioneering spirit had lasted perhaps two generations; thereafter the colonists were content to work as much as necessary (but no more), to dream nostalgically of Earth, and to let the future look after itself.

The village was seething with speculation when Clyde and Lora arrived. News had already come from the northern end of the island that the ship had spent its furious speed and was heading back at a low altitude, obviously looking for a place to land. "They'll still have the old maps," someone said. "Ten to one they'll ground where the First Expedition landed, up in the hills."

It was a shrewd guess, and within minutes all available transport was moving out of the village, along the seldom-used road to the west. As befitted the mayor of so important a cultural center as Palm Bay (Pop: 572; occupations: fishing, hydroponics; industries: none), Lora's father led the way in his official car. The fact that its annual coat of paint was just about due was perhaps a little unfortunate; one could only hope that the visitors would overlook the occasional patches of bare metal. After all, the car itself was quite new; Lora could distinctly remember the excitement its arrival had caused, only thirteen years ago.

The little caravan of assorted cars, trucks—and even a couple of straining sand-sleds—rolled over the crest of the hill and ground to a halt beside the weathered sign with its simple but impressive words:

LANDING SITE OF THE FIRST
EXPEDITION TO THALASSA
1 JANUARY, YEAR ZERO
(28 May, 2626 A.D.)

The *First Expedition*, Lora repeated silently. There had never been a second one—but *here it was* . . .

The ship came in so low, and so silently, that it was almost upon them before they were aware of it. There was no sound of engines—only a brief rustling of leaves as the displaced air stirred among the trees. Then all was still once more, but it seemed to Lora that the shining ovoid resting on the turf was a great silver egg, waiting to hatch and to bring something new and

strange into the peaceful world of Thalassa.

"It's so small," someone whispered behind her. "They couldn't have come from Earth in *that* thing!"

"Of course not," the inevitable self-appointed expert replied at once. "That's only a life-boat—the real ship's up there in space. Don't you remember that the First Expedition—"

"Sssh!" someone else remonstrated. "They're coming out!"

It happened in the space of a single heart-beat. One second the seamless hull was so smooth and unbroken that the eye looked in vain for any sign of an opening. And then, an instant later, there was an oval doorway with a short ramp leading to the ground. Nothing had moved, but something had *happened*. How it had been done, Lora could not imagine, but she accepted the miracle without surprise. Such things were only to be expected of a ship that came from Earth.

There were figures moving inside the shadowed entrance; not a sound came from the waiting crowd as the visitors slowly emerged and stood blinking in the fierce light of an unfamiliar sun. There were seven of them—all men—and they did not look in the least like the super-beings she had expected. It was true that they were all somewhat above the average in height and had thin, clear-cut features, but they were so pale that their skins were almost white. They seemed, moreover, worried and uncertain, which was something that puzzled Lora very

much. For the first time it occurred to her that this landing on Thalassa might be unintentional, and that the visitors were as surprised to be here as the islanders were to greet them.

The Mayor of Palm Bay, confronted with the supreme moment of his career, stepped forward to deliver the speech on which he had been frantically working ever since the car left the village. A second before he opened his mouth, a sudden doubt struck him and sponged his memory clean. Everyone had automatically assumed that this ship came from Earth—but that was pure guesswork. It might just as easily have been sent here from one of the other colonies, of which there were at least a dozen much closer than the parent world. In his panic over protocol, all that Lora's father could manage was: "We welcome you to Thalassa. You're from Earth—I presume?" That "I presume?" was to make Mayor Fordyce immortal; it would be a century before anyone discovered that the phrase was not quite original.

In all that waiting crowd, Lora was the only one who never heard the confirming answer, spoken in English that seemed to have speeded up a trifle during the centuries of separation. For in that moment, she saw Leon for the first time.

He came out of the ship, moving as unobtrusively as possible to join his companions at the foot of the ramp. Perhaps he had remained behind to make some adjustment to the controls; perhaps—and this seemed more likely—he had been reporting the progress of the meet-

ing to the great mother ship which must be hanging up there in space, far beyond the uttermost fringes of the atmosphere. Whatever the reason, from then onwards Lora had eyes for no one else.

Even in that first instant, she knew that her life could never again be the same. This was something new and beyond all her experience, filling her at the same moment with wonder and fear. Her fear was for the love she felt for Clyde—her wonder for the new and unknown thing that had come, miraculously, into her life.

Leon was not as tall as his companions, but was much more stockily built, giving an impression of power and competence. His eyes, very dark and full of animation, were deep-set in rough-hewn features which no one could have called handsome, yet which Lora found disturbingly attractive. Here was a man who had looked upon sights she could not imagine—a man who, perhaps, had walked the streets of Earth and seen its fabled cities. What was he doing here on lonely Thalassa, and why were those lines of strain and worry about his ceaselessly searching eyes?

He had looked at her once already, but his gaze had swept on without faltering. Now it came back, as if prompted by memory, and for the first time he became conscious of Lora, as all along she had been aware of him. Their eyes locked, bridging gulfs of time and space and experience. The anxious furrows faded from Leon's brow, the tense lines slowly relaxed, and presently he smiled.

IT WAS DUSK when the speeches, the banquets, the receptions, the interviews were over. Leon was very tired, but his mind was far too active to allow him to sleep. After the strain of the last few weeks, when he awoke to the shrill clamor of alarms and fought with his colleagues to save the wounded ship, it was hard to realise that they had reached safety at last. What incredible good fortune, that this inhabited planet had been so close! Even if they could not repair the ship and complete the two centuries of flight that still lay before them, here at least they could remain among friends. No shipwrecked mariners, of sea or space, could hope for more than that.

The night was cool and calm, and ablaze with unfamiliar stars. Yet there were still some old friends, even though the ancient patterns of the constellations were hopelessly lost. There was mighty Rigel, no fainter for all the added light-years that its rays must now cross before they reached his eyes. And that must be giant Canopus, almost in line with their destination, but so much more remote that even when they reached their new home, it would seem no brighter than in the skies of Earth.

Leon shook his head, as if to clear the stupefying, hypnotic image of immensity from his mind. Forget the stars, he told himself; you will face them again soon enough. Cling to this little world while you are upon it, even though it may be a grain of dust on the road between the Earth you will never see again and the goal that waits for you at

journey's end, two hundred years from now.

His friends were already sleeping, tired and content, as they had a right to be. Soon he would join them—when his restless spirit would allow him. But first he would see something of this world to which chance had brought him, this oasis peopled by his own kinsmen in the deserts of space.

He left the long, single-storied guest-house that had been prepared for them in such obvious haste, and walked out into the single street of Palm Bay. There was no one about, though sleepy music came from a few houses. It seemed that the villagers believed in going to bed early—or perhaps they too were exhausted by the excitement and hospitality of the day. That suited Leon, who wanted only to be left alone until his racing thoughts had slowed to rest.

Out of the quiet night around him he became aware of the murmuring sea, and the sound drew his footsteps away from the empty street. It was dark among the palms, when the lights of the village had faded behind him, but the smaller of Thalassa's two moons was high in the South and its curious yellow glow gave him all the guidance he required. Presently he was through the narrow belt of trees, and there at the end of the steeply shelving beach lay the ocean that covered almost all this world.

A line of fishing-boats was drawn up at the water's edge, and Leon walked slowly towards them, curious to see how the craftsmen of Thalassa had solved one of man's

oldest problems. He looked approvingly at the trim plastic hulls, the narrow outrigger float, the power-operated winch for raising the nets, the compact little motor, the radio with its direction-finding loop. This almost primitive, yet completely adequate simplicity had a profound appeal to him; it was hard to think of a greater contrast to the labyrinthine complexities of the mighty ship hanging up there above his head. For a moment he amused himself with fantasy; how pleasant to jettison all his years of training and study and exchange the life of a starship propulsion engineer for the peaceful, undemanding existence of a fisherman. They must need someone to keep their boats in order, and perhaps he could think of a few improvements . . .

He shrugged away the rosy dream, without bothering to marshal all its obvious fallacies, and began to walk along the shifting line of foam where the waves had spent their last strength against the land. Underfoot was the debris of this young ocean's new-born life—empty shells and carapaces that might have littered the coasts of Earth a billion years ago. Here, for instance, was a tightly-wound spiral of limestone which he had surely seen before in some museum. It might well be; any design that had once served her purpose, Nature repeated endlessly on world after world.

A faint yellow glow was spreading swiftly across the eastern sky; even as Leon watched, Selene, the inner moon, edged itself above the horizon. With astonishing speed, the

entire gibbous disc climbed out of the sea, flooding the beach with sudden light.

And in that burst of brilliance, Leon saw that he was not alone.

The girl was sitting on one of the boats, about fifty yards further along the beach. Her back was turned towards him and she was staring out to sea, apparently unaware of his presence. Leon hesitated, not wishing to invade on her solitude, and uncertain of the local mores in these matters. It seemed highly likely, at such a time and place, that she was waiting for someone; it might be safest, and most tactful, to turn quietly back to the village.

He had left it too late. As if startled by the flood of new light along the beach, the girl looked up and at once caught sight of him. She rose to her feet with an unhurried grace, showing no sign of alarm or annoyance. Indeed, if Leon could have seen her face clearly in the moonlight, he would have been surprised at the quiet satisfaction it expressed.

Only twelve hours ago, Lora would have been indignant had anyone suggested that she would meet a complete stranger here on this lonely beach when the rest of the world was slumbering. Even now, she might have tried to rationalize her behavior, to argue that she felt restless and could not sleep, and had therefore decided to go for a walk. But she knew in her heart that this was not the truth; all day long she had been haunted by the image of that young engineer, whose name and position she had man-

aged to discover without, she hoped, arousing too much curiosity among her friends.

It was not even luck that she had seen him leave the Guesthouse; she had been watching most of the evening from the porch of her father's residence, on the other side of the street. And it was certainly not luck, but deliberate and careful planning, that had taken her to this point on the beach as soon as she was sure of the direction Leon was heading.

He came to a halt a dozen feet away. (Did he recognise her? Did he guess that this was no accident? For a moment her courage almost failed her, but it was too late now to retreat.) Then he gave a curious, twisted smile that seemed to light up his whole face and made him look even younger than he was.

"Hello," he said. "I never expected to meet anyone at this time of night. I hope I haven't disturbed you."

"Of course not," Lora answered, trying to keep her voice as steady and emotionless as she could.

"I'm from the ship, you know. I thought I'd have a look at Thalassa while I'm here."

At those last words, a sudden change of expression crossed Lora's face; the sadness he saw there puzzled Leon, for it could have no cause. And then, with an instantaneous shock of recognition, he knew that he had seen this girl before and understood what she was doing here. This was the girl who had smiled at him when he came out of the ship . . .

There seemed nothing to say.

They stared at each other across the wrinkled sand, each wondering at the miracle that had brought them together out of the immensity of time and space. Then, as if in unconscious agreement, they sat facing each other on the gunwale of the boat, still without a word.

"This is folly, Leon told himself. What am I doing here? What right have I, a wanderer passing through this world, to touch the lives of its people? I should make my apologies and leave this girl to the beach and the sea that are her birthright, not mine.

Yet he did not leave. The bright disc of Selene had risen a full hand's breadth above the sea when he said at last: "What's your name?"

"I'm Lora," she answered, in the soft, lilting accent of the islanders which was so attractive, but not always easy to understand.

"And I'm Leon Carrell, Assistant Propulsion Engineer, Star-ship *Magellan*."

She gave a little smile as he introduced himself, and at that moment Leon was certain that she already knew his name. At the same time a completely irrelevant and whimsical thought struck him; until a few minutes ago he had been dead-tired, just about to turn back for his overdue sleep. Yet now he was fully awake and alert—poised, as it were, on the brink of a new and unpredictable adventure.

But Lora's next remark was predictable enough: "How do you like *Thalassa*?"

"Give me time," Leon countered. "I've only seen Palm Bay, and not much of that."

"Will you be here—very long?"

The pause was barely perceptible, but his ear detected it. *This* was the question that really mattered.

"I'm not sure," he replied, truthfully enough. "It depends how long the repairs take."

"What went wrong?"

"Oh, we ran into something too big for our meteor screen to absorb. And—bang!—that was the end of the screen. So we've got to make a new one."

"And you think you can do that here?"

"We hope so. The main problem will be lifting about a million tons of water up to the *Magellan*. Luckily, I think *Thalassa* can spare it."

"Water? I don't understand."

"Well, you know that a star-ship travels at almost the speed of light; even then it takes years to get anywhere, so that we have to go into suspended animation and let the automatic controls run the ship."

Lora nodded "Of course—that's how our ancestors got here."

"Well, the speed would be no problem if space was really empty, but it isn't. A star-ship sweeps up thousands of atoms of hydrogen, particles of dust, and sometimes larger fragments, every second of its flight. At nearly the speed of light, these bits of cosmic junk have enormous energy, and could soon burn up the ship. So we carry a shield about a mile ahead of us, and let *that* get burnt up instead. Do you have umbrellas on this world?"

"Why—yes," Lora replied, obviously baffled by the incongruous question.

"Then you can compare a star-ship to a man moving head-down through a rain-storm behind the cover of an umbrella. The rain is the cosmic dust between the stars, and our ship was unlucky enough to lose its umbrella."

"And you can make a new one of *water*?"

"Yes; it's the cheapest building material in the universe. We freeze it into an iceberg which travels ahead of us. What could be simpler than that?"

Lora did not answer; her thoughts seemed to have veered on to a new track. Presently she said, her voice so low and wistful that Leon had to bend forward to hear it against the rolling of the surf: "And you left Earth a hundred years ago."

"A hundred and four. Of course, it seems only a few weeks, since we were deep-sleeping until the autopilot revived us. All the colonists are still in suspended animation; they don't know that anything's happened."

"And presently you'll join them again, and sleep your way on to the stars."

Leon nodded, avoiding her eye. "That's right. Planetfall will be a few months late, but what does that matter on a trip that takes three hundred years?"

Lora pointed to the island behind them, and then to the shoreless sea at whose edge they stood.

"It's strange to think that your sleeping friends up there will never know anything of all this. I feel sorry for them."

"Yes, only we fifty or so engineers

will have any memories of Thalassa. To everyone else in the ship, our stop here will be nothing more than a two-hundred-year-old entry in the log-book."

He glanced at Lora's face, and saw again that sadness in her eyes.

"Why does that make you unhappy?"

She shook her head, unable to answer. How could one express the sense of loneliness that Leon's words had brought to her? The lives of men, and all their hopes and fears, were so little against the inconceivable immensities that they had dared to challenge. The thought of that three-hundred-year journey, not yet half completed, was something from which her mind recoiled in horror. And yet—in her own veins was the blood of those earlier pioneers who had followed the same path to Thalassa, centuries ago.

The night was no longer friendly. She felt a sudden longing for her home and family, for the little room which held everything she owned and which was all the world she knew or wanted. The cold of space was freezing her heart; she wished now that she had never come on this mad adventure. It was time—more than time—to leave.

As she rose to her feet, she noticed that they had been sitting on Clyde's boat, and wondered what unconscious prompting of her mind had brought her here to this one vessel out of all the little fleet lined up along the beach. At the thought of Clyde, a spasm of uncertainty, even of guilt, swept over her. Never in her life, except for the most fleet-

ing moments, had she thought of any other man but him. Now she could no longer pretend that this was true.

"What's the matter?" asked Leon. "Are you cold?" He held out his hand to her, and for the first time their fingers touched as she automatically responded. But at the instant of contact, she shied like a startled animal and jerked away.

"I'm all right," she answered, almost angrily. "It's late—I must go home. Good-bye."

Her reaction was so abrupt that it took Leon by surprise. Had he said anything to offend her? he wondered. She was already walking quickly away when he called after her: "I will see you again?"

If she answered, the sound of the waves carried away her voice. He watched her go, puzzled and a little hurt, while not for the first time in his life he reflected how hard it was to understand the mind of a woman.

For a moment he thought of following her and repeating the question, but in his heart he knew there was no need. As surely as the sun would rise tomorrow, they would meet again.

AND NOW the life of the island was dominated by the crippled giant a thousand miles out in space. Before dawn and after sunset, when the world was in darkness but the light of the sun still streamed overhead, the *Magellan* was visible as a brilliant star, the brightest object in all the sky except the two moons themselves. But even when it could

not be seen—when it was lost in the glare of day or eclipsed by the shadow of *Thalassa*—it was never far from men's thoughts.

It was hard to believe that only fifty of the star-ship's crew had been awakened, and that not even half of those were on *Thalassa* at any one time. They seemed to be everywhere, usually in little groups of two or three, walking swiftly on mysterious errands or riding small anti-gravity scooters which floated a few feet from the ground, and moved so silently that they made life in the village rather hazardous. Despite the most pressing invitations, the visitors had still taken no part in the cultural and social activities of the island. They had explained, politely but firmly, that until the safety of their ship was secured, they would have no time for any other interests. Later, certainly, but not now . . .

So *Thalassa* had to wait with what patience it could muster, while the Earthmen set up their instruments, made their surveys, drilled deep into the rocks of the island, and carried out scores of experiments which seemed to have no possible connection with their problem. Sometimes they consulted briefly with *Thalassa's* own scientists, but on the whole they kept to themselves. It was not that they were unfriendly or aloof; they were working with such a fierce and dedicated intensity that they were scarcely aware of anyone around them.

After their first meeting, it was two days before Lora spoke to Leon again. She saw him from time to time as he hurried about the village,

usually with a bulging brief-case and an abstracted expression, but they were able to exchange only the briefest of smiles. Yet even this was enough to keep her emotions in turmoil, to banish her peace of mind, and to poison her relationship with Clyde.

As long as she could remember he had been part of her life; they had had their quarrels and disagreements, but no-one else had ever challenged his place in her heart. In a few months they would be married—yet now she was not even sure of that, or indeed of anything.

"Infatuation" was an ugly word, which one applied only to other people. But how else could she explain this yearning to be with a man who had come suddenly into her life from nowhere, and who must leave again in a few days or weeks? No doubt the glamor and romance of his origin was partly responsible, but that alone was not enough to account for it. There were other Earthmen better-looking than Leon, yet she had eyes for him alone and her life now was empty unless she was in his presence.

By the end of the first day only her family knew about her feelings; by the end of the second everyone she passed gave her a knowing smile. It was impossible to keep a secret in such a tight and talkative a community as Palm Bay, and she knew better than to attempt it.

Her second meeting with Leon was accidental—as far as such things can ever be accidents. She was helping her father deal with some of the correspondence and en-

quiries which had flooded upon the village since the Earthmen's arrival, and was trying to make some sense out of her notes when the door of the office opened. It had opened so often in the last few days that she had ceased to look up; her younger sister was acting as receptionist and dealt with all the visitors. Then she heard Leon's voice; and the paper blurred before her eyes, the notes might have been in an unknown language.

"May I see the Mayor, please?"

"Of course, Mr.—?"

"Assistant Engineer Carrell."

"I'll go and fetch him. Won't you sit down?"

Leon slumped wearily on the ancient armchair that was the best the reception room could offer its infrequent visitors, and not until then did he notice that Lora was watching him silently from the other side of the room. At once he sloughed off his tiredness and shot to his feet.

"Hello—I didn't know you worked here."

"I live here; my father's the Mayor."

This portentous news did not seem to impress Leon unduly. He walked over to the desk, and picked up the fat volume through which Lora had been browsing between her secretarial duties.

"'A Concise History of Earth,'" he read, "'from the Dawn of Civilization to the Beginning of Interstellar Flight.' And all in a thousand pages! It's a pity it ends three hundred years ago."

"We hope that you'll soon bring us up to date. Has much happened

since that was written?"

"Enough to fill about fifty libraries, I suppose. But before we go, we'll leave you copies of all our records, so that your history books will only be a hundred years out of date."

They were circling round each other, avoiding the only thing that was important. When can we meet again? Lora's thoughts kept hammering silently, unable to break through the barrier of speech. And does he really like me, or is he merely making polite conversation?

The inner door opened, and the Mayor emerged apologetically from his office.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Carrell, but the President was on the line—he's coming over this afternoon. And what can I do for you?"

Lora pretended to work, but she typed the same sentence eight times while Leon delivered his message from the captain of the *Magellan*. She was not a great deal wiser when he had finished; it seemed that the star-ship's engineers wished to build some equipment on a headland a mile from the village, and wanted to make sure there would be no objection.

"Of course!" said Mayor Fordyce expansively, in his nothing's-too-good-for-our-guests tone of voice. "Go right ahead—the land doesn't belong to anybody, and no-one lives there. What do you want to do with it?"

"We're building a gravity inverter, and the generator has to be anchored in solid bedrock. It may be a little noisy when it starts to run,

but I don't think it will disturb you here in the village. And of course we'll dismantle the equipment when we've finished."

Lora had to admire her father. She knew perfectly well that Leon's request was as meaningless to him as it was to her, but one would never have guessed it.

"That's perfectly all right—glad to be of any help we can. And will you tell Captain Gold that the President's coming at five this afternoon? I'll send my car to collect him; the reception's at five thirty in the village Hall."

When Leon had given his thanks and departed, Mayor Fordyce walked over to his daughter and picked up the slim pile of correspondence she had none-too-accurately typed.

"He seems a pleasant young man," he said, "but is it a good idea to get too fond of him?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Now, Lora! After all, I am your father, and I'm not *completely* unobservant."

"He's not—not—a bit interested in me."

"Are you interested in him?"

"I don't know. Oh, Daddy, I'm so unhappy!"

Mayor Fordyce was not a brave man, so there was only one thing he could do. He donated his handkerchief and fled back into his office.

IT WAS the most difficult problem that Clyde had ever faced in his life, and there were no precedents that gave any help at all. Lora belonged to him—everyone knew

that. If his rival had been another villager, or someone from any other part of Thalassa, he knew exactly what he would have done. But the laws of hospitality, and above all his natural awe for anything of Earth, prevented him from politely asking Leon to take his attentions elsewhere. It would not be the first time *that* had happened, and there had never been the slightest trouble on those earlier occasions. That could have been because Clyde was over six feet tall, proportionally broad, and had no excess fat on his 190 pound frame.

During the long hours at sea, when he had nothing else to do but to brood, Clyde toyed with the idea of a short, sharp bout with Leon. It would be very short; though Leon was not as skinny as most of the Earthmen, he shared their pale, washed-out look and was obviously no match for anyone who led a life of physical activity. That was the trouble—it wouldn't be fair. Clyde knew that public opinion would be outraged if he had a fight with Leon, however justified he might be.

And how justified was he? That was the big problem that worried Clyde, as it had worried a good many billion men before him. It seemed that Leon was now practically one of the family; every time he called at the Mayor's house the Earthman seemed to be there on some pretext or other. Jealousy was an emotion which had never afflicted Clyde before, and he did not enjoy the symptoms.

He was still furious about the dance. It had been the biggest so-

cial event for years; indeed, it was not likely that Palm Bay would ever match it again in the whole of its history. To have the President of Thalassa, half the Council, and fifty visitors from Earth in the village at the same moment was not something that could happen again this side of Eternity.

For all his size and strength, Clyde was a good dancer—especially with Lora. But tonight he had little chance of proving it; Leon was too busy demonstrating the latest steps from Earth (latest, that is, if you overlooked the fact that they must have passed out of fashion a hundred years ago). In Clyde's opinion, Leon's technique was very poor and the dances were ugly; the interest that Lora showed in them was perfectly ridiculous.

He had been foolish enough to tell her so when his opportunity came; and that was the last dance he had had with Lora that evening. From then onwards, he might not have been there as far as she was concerned. Clyde endured the boycott as long as he could, then left for the bar with one objective in mind. He quickly attained it, and not until he came reluctantly to his senses the next morning did he discover what he had missed.

The dancing had ended early. There had been a short speech from the President—his third that evening—introducing the commander of the starship and promising a little surprise. Captain Gold had been equally brief; he was obviously a man more accustomed to orders than orations.

"Friends," he began. "You know

why we're here, and I've no need to say how much we appreciate your hospitality and kindness. We shall never forget you, and we're only sorry that we have so little time to see your beautiful island and its people. I hope you will forgive us for any seeming discourtesy, but the repair of our ship, and the safety of our companions, has had to take priority in our minds.

"In the long run, the accident that brought us here may be fortunate for us both. It has given us happy memories, and also inspiration. What we have seen here is a lesson to us. May we make the world that is waiting at the end of our journey as fair a home for mankind as you have made *Thalassa*.

"And before we resume our voyage, it is both a duty and a pleasure to leave with you all the records we can that will bridge the gap since you last had contact with Earth. Tomorrow we shall invite your scientists and historians up to our ship so that they can copy any of our information tapes they desire. Thus we hope to leave you a legacy which will enrich your world for generations to come. That is the very least we can do.

"But tonight, science and history can wait, for we have other treasures aboard. Earth has not been idle in the centuries since your forefathers left. Listen, now, to some of the heritage we share together, and which we will leave upon *Thalassa* before we go our way."

The lights dimmed; the music began. Noone who was present would ever forget this moment. In a trance of wonder, Lora listened

to what men had wrought in sound during the centuries of separation. Time meant nothing; she was not even conscious of Leon standing by her side, holding her hand, as the music ebbed and flowed around them.

These were the things that she had never known, the things that belonged to Earth, and to Earth alone. The slow beat of mighty bells, climbing like invisible smoke from old cathedral spires; the chant of patient boatmen, in a thousand tongues now lost forever, rowing home against the tide in the last light of day; the songs of armies marching into battles that Time had robbed of all their pain and evil; the merged murmur of ten million voices as Man's greatest cities woke to meet the dawn; the cold dance of the *Aurora* over endless seas of ice; the roar of mighty engines climbing upwards on the highway to the stars. All these she heard in the music and the songs that came out of the night—the songs of distant Earth, carried to her across the light-years. . .

A clear soprano voice, swooping and soaring like a bird at the very edge of hearing, was singing a wordless lament that tore at the heart. It was a dirge for all love lost in the loneliness of space, for friends and homes that could never again be seen and must fade at last from memory. It was a song for all exiles, and it spoke as clearly to those who were sundered from Earth by a dozen generations as to the voyagers to whom its fields and cities still seemed only weeks away.

The music died into the dark-

ness; misty-eyed, avoiding words, the people of Thalassa went slowly to their homes. But Lora did not go to hers; against the loneliness that had pierced her very soul, there was only one defence. And presently she found it, in the warm night of the forest, as Leon's arms tightened around her and their souls and bodies merged. Like wayfarers lost in a hostile wilderness, they sought warmth and comfort beside the fire of love. While that fire burned, they were safe from the shadows that prowled in the night, and all the universe of stars and planets shrank to a toy that they could hold within their hands.

TO LEON, it was never wholly real. Despite all the urgency and peril that had brought them here, he sometimes fancied that at journey's end it would be hard to convince himself that Thalassa was not a dream that had come in his long sleep. This fierce and foredoomed love, for example; he had not asked for it—it had been thrust upon him. Yet there were few men, he told himself, who would not have taken it, had they too landed, after weeks of grinding anxiety, on this peaceful, pleasant world.

When he could escape from work, he had long walks with Lora in the fields far from the village, where men seldom came and only the robot cultivators disturbed the solitude. For hours Lora would question him about Earth—but she would never speak of the planet which was the *Magellan's* goal. He understood her reasons well enough,

and did his best to satisfy her endless curiosity about the world that was already "home" to more men than had ever seen it with their own eyes.

She was bitterly disappointed to hear that the age of cities had passed. Despite all that Leon could tell her about the completely decentralized culture that now covered the planet from Pole to Pole, she still thought of Earth in terms of such vanished giants as Chandrigar, London, Astrograd, New York, and it was hard for her to realize that they had gone forever, and with them the way of life they represented.

"When we left Earth," Leon explained, "the largest centers of population were university towns like Oxford or Ann Arbor or Canberra; some of them had fifty thousand students and professors. There are no other cities left of even half that size."

"But what happened to them?"

"Oh, there was no single cause, but the development of communications started it. As soon as anyone on Earth could see and talk to anyone else by pressing a button, most of the need for cities vanished. Then anti-gravity was invented, and you could move goods or houses or anything else through the sky without bothering about geography. That completed the job of wiping out distance that the airplane had begun a couple of centuries earlier. After that, men started to live where they liked, and the cities dwindled away."

For a moment Lora did not answer; she was lying on a bank of

grass, watching the behavior of a bee whose ancestors, like hers, had been citizens of Earth. It was trying vainly to extract honey from one of Thalassa's native flowers; insect life had not yet arisen on this world, and the few indigenous flowers had not yet invented lures for air-borne visitors.

The frustrated bee gave up the hopeless task and buzzed angrily away; Lora hoped that it would have enough sense to head back to the orchards where it would find more co-operative flowers. When she spoke again, it was to voice a dream that had now haunted mankind for almost a thousand years.

"Do you suppose," she said wistfully, "that we'll ever break through the speed of light?"

Leon smiled, knowing where her thoughts were leading. To travel faster than light—to go home to Earth, yet to return to your native world while your friends were still alive—every colonist must, at some time or other, have dreamed of this. There was no problem, in the whole history of the human race, which had called forth so much effort and which still remained so utterly intractable.

"I don't believe so," he said. "If it could be done, someone would have discovered how by this time. No—we have to do it the slow way, because there isn't any other. That's how the Universe is built, and there's nothing we can do about it."

"But surely we could still keep in touch!"

Leon nodded. "That's true," he said, "and we try to. I don't know what's gone wrong, but you should

have heard from Earth long before now. We've been sending out robot message-carriers to all the colonies, carrying a full history of everything that's happened up to the time of departure, and asking for a report back. As the news returns to Earth, it's all transcribed and sent out again by the next messenger. So we have a kind of interstellar news service, with the Earth as the central clearing house. It's slow, of course, but there's no other way of doing it. If the last messenger to Thalassa has been lost, there must be another on the way—maybe several, twenty or thirty years apart."

Lora tried to envisage the vast, star-spanning network of message-carriers, shuttling back and forth between Earth and its scattered children, and wondered why Thalassa had been overlooked. But with Leon beside her, it did not seem important. He was here; Earth and the stars were very far away. And so also, with whatever unhappiness it might bring, was tomorrow. . .

BY THE END of the week, the visitors had built a squat and heavily-braced monster of metal girders, housing some obscure mechanism, on a rocky headland overlooking the sea. Lora, in common with the 571 other inhabitants of Palm Bay and the several thousand sightseers who had descended upon the village, was watching when the first test was made. No one was allowed to go within a quarter of a mile of the machine—a precaution which aroused a good deal of alarm

among the more nervous islanders. Did the Earthmen know what they were doing? Suppose that something went wrong? And *what* were they doing, anyway?

Leon was there with his friends inside the metal monster, making the final adjustments—the 'coarse focussing', he had told Lora, leaving her none the wiser. She watched with the same anxious incomprehension as all her fellow islanders until the distant figures emerged from the machine and walked to the edge of the flat-topped rock on which it was built. There they stood, a tiny group of figures silhouetted against the ocean, staring out to sea.

A mile from the shore, something strange was happening to the water. It seemed that a storm was brewing—but a storm that kept within an area only a few hundred yards across. Mountainous waves were building up, smashing against each other and then swiftly subsiding again. Within a few minutes the ripples of the disturbance had reached the shore, but the center of the tiny storm showed no sign of movement. It was as if, Lora told herself, an invisible finger had reached down from the sky and was stirring the sea.

Quite abruptly, the entire pattern changed. Now the waves were no longer battering against each other; they were marching in step, moving more and more swiftly in a tight circle. A cone of water was rising from the sea, becoming taller and thinner with every second. Already it was a hundred feet high, and the sound of its birth was an

angry roaring that filled the air and struck terror into the hearts of all who heard it. All, that is, except the little band of men who had summoned this miracle from the deep, and who still stood watching it with calm assurance, ignoring the waves that were breaking almost against their feet.

Now the spinning tower of water was climbing swiftly up the sky, piercing the clouds like an arrow as it headed towards space. Its foam-capped summit was already lost beyond sight, and from the sky there began to fall a steady shower of rain, the drops abnormally large like those which prelude a thunderstorm. Not all the water that was being lifted from Thalassa's single ocean was reaching its distant goal; some was escaping from the power that controlled it and was falling back from the edge of space.

Slowly the watching crowd drifted away, impressed but not in the least over-awed by what it had seen. Man had been able to control gravity for half a thousand years, and this trick—spectacular though it was—could not be compared with the miracle of hurling a great star-ship from sun to sun at little short of the speed of light.

The Earthmen were now walking back towards their machine, clearly satisfied with what they had done. Even at this distance, one could see that they were happy and relaxed, perhaps for the first time since they had reached Thalassa. The water to rebuild the *Magellan's* shield was on its way out into space, to be shaped and frozen by the other strange forces that these men

had made their servants. In a few days, they would be ready to leave, their great interstellar ark as good as new.

Even until this minute, Lora had hoped that they might fail. There was nothing left of that hope now, as she watched the man-made waterspout lift its burden from the sea. Sometimes it wavered slightly, its base shifting back and forth as if at the balance point between immense and invisible forces. But it was fully under control, and it would do the task that had been set for it. That meant only one thing to her; soon she must say good-bye to Leon.

SHE WALKED slowly towards the distant group of Earthmen, marshalling her thoughts and trying to subdue her emotions. Presently Leon broke away from his friends and came to meet her; relief and happiness were written across his face, but they faded swiftly when he saw Lora's expression.

"Well," he said lamely, almost like a schoolboy caught in some crime, "we've done it."

"And now—how long will you be here?"

He scuffed nervously at the sand, unable to meet her eye.

"Oh, about three days—perhaps four."

She tried to assimilate the words calmly; after all, she had expected them—this was nothing new. But she failed completely, and it was as well that there was no one near them.

"You can't leave!" she cried desperately. "Stay here!"

Leon took her hands gently, then murmured: "No, Lora—this isn't my world; I would never fit into it. Half my life's been spent training for the work I'm doing now; I could never be happy here, where there aren't any more frontiers. In a month, I should die of boredom."

"Then take me with you!"

"You don't really mean that."

"But I do!"

"You only think so; you'd be more out of place in my world than I would be in yours."

"I could learn—there would be plenty of things I could do. As long as we could stay together!"

He held her at arm's length, looking into her eyes. They mirrored sorrow, and also sincerity. She really believed what she was saying, Leon told himself. For the first time, his conscience smote him. He had forgotten—or chosen not to remember—how much more serious these things could be to a woman than to a man.

He had never intended to hurt Lora; he was very fond of her, and would remember her with affection all his life. Now he was discovering, as so many men before him had done, that it was not always easy to say good-bye.

There was only one thing to do. Better a short, sharp pain than a long bitterness.

"Come with me, Lora," he said. "I have something to show you."

They did not speak as Leon led the way to the clearing which the Earthmen used as a landing ground. It was littered with pieces of enigmatic equipment, some of them being repacked while others were

being left behind for the islanders to use as they pleased. Several of the gravity-scooters were parked in the shade beneath the palms; even when not in use they spurned contact with the ground, and hovered a couple of feet above the grass.

But it was not these that Leon was interested in; he walked purposefully towards the gleaming oval that dominated the clearing, and spoke a few words to the engineer who was standing beside it. There was a short argument; then the other capitulated with fairly good grace.

"It's not fully loaded," Leon explained as he helped Lora up the ramp. "But we're going just the same. The other shuttle will be down in half an hour, anyway."

Already Lora was in a world she had never known before—a world of technology in which the most brilliant engineer or scientist of Thalassa would be lost. The island possessed all the machines it needed for its life and happiness; this was something utterly beyond its ken. Lora had once seen the great computer that was the virtual ruler of her people and with those decisions they disagreed not once in a generation. That giant brain was huge and complex, but there was an awesome simplicity about this machine that impressed even her non-technical mind. When Leon sat down at the absurdly small control board, his hands seemed to do nothing except rest lightly upon it.

Yet the walls were suddenly transparent—and there was Thalassa, already shrinking below them. There had been no sense of move-

ment, no whisper of sound, yet the island was dwindling even as she watched. The misty edge of the world, a great bow dividing the blue of the sea from the velvet blackness of space, was becoming more curved with every passing second.

"Look," said Leon, pointing to the stars.

The ship was already visible, and Lora felt a sudden sense of disappointment that it was so small. She could see a cluster of port-holes around the center section, but there appeared to be no other breaks anywhere on the vessel's squat and angular hull.

The illusion lasted only for a second. Then, with a shock of incredulity that made her senses reel and brought her to the edge of vertigo, she saw how hopelessly her eyes had been deceived. Those were no port-holes; the ship was still miles away. What she was seeing were the gaping hatches through which the ferries could shuttle on their journeys between the star-ship and Thalassa.

There is no sense of perspective in space, where all objects are still clear and sharp whatever their distance. Even when the hull of the ship was looming up beside them, an endless curving wall of metal eclipsing the stars; there was still no real way of judging its size. She could only guess that it must be at least two miles in length.

The ferry berthed itself, as far as Lora could judge, without any intervention from Leon. She followed him out of the little control rooms, and when the airlock opened she

was surprised to discover that they could step directly into one of the star-ship's passageways.

THEY WERE standing in a long tubular corridor that stretched in either direction as far as the eye could see. The floor was moving beneath their feet, carrying them along swiftly and effortlessly—yet strangely enough Lora had felt no sudden jerk as she stepped on to the conveyer that was now sweeping her through the ship. One more mystery she would never explain; there would be many others before Leon had finished showing her the *Magellan*.

It was an hour before they met another human being. In that time they must have travelled miles, sometimes being carried along by the moving corridors, sometimes being lifted up long tubes within which gravity had been abolished. It was obvious what Leon was trying to do; he was attempting to give her some faint impression of the size and complexity of this artificial world which had been built to carry the seeds of a new civilization to the stars.

The engine-room alone, with its sleeping, shrouded monsters of metal and crystal, must have been half a mile in length. As they stood on the balcony high above that vast arena of latent power, Leon said proudly, and perhaps not altogether accurately: "These are mine." Lora looked down on the huge and meaningless shapes that had carried Leon to her across the light-years, and did not know whether to bless

them for what they had brought, or to curse them for what they might soon take away.

They sped swiftly through cavernous holds, packed with all the machines and instruments and stores needed to mould a virgin planet and to make it a fit home for humanity. There were miles upon miles of storage racks, holding in tape or microfilm or still more compact form the cultural heritage of mankind. Here they met a group of experts from *Thalassa*, looking rather dazed, trying to decide how much of all this wealth they could loot in the few hours left to them.

Had her own ancestors, Lora wondered, been so well equipped when they crossed space? She doubted it; their ship had been far smaller, and Earth must have learned much about the techniques of interstellar colonization in the centuries since *Thalassa* was opened up. When the *Magellan's* sleeping travellers reached their new home, their success was assured if their spirit matched their material resources.

Now they had come to a great white door which slid silently open as they approached to reveal—of all incongruous things to find inside a spaceship—a cloakroom in which lines of heavy furs hung from pegs. Leon helped Lora to climb into one of these, then selected another for himself. She followed him uncomprehendingly as he walked towards a circle of frosted glass set in the floor; then he turned to her and said: "There's no gravity where we're going now, so keep close to me and do exactly as I say."

The crystal trap-door swung upwards like an opening watch-glass, and out of the depths swirled a blast of cold such as Lora had never imagined, still less experienced. Thin wisps of moisture condensed in the freezing air, dancing round her like ghosts. She looked at Leon as if to say "Surely you don't expect me to go down *there!*"

He took her arm reassuringly and said "Don't worry—you won't notice the cold after a few minutes. I'll go first."

The trapdoor swallowed him; Lora hesitated for a moment, then lowered herself after him. *Lowered?* No; that was the wrong word; up and down no longer existed here. Gravity had been abolished—she was floating without weight in this frigid, snow-white universe. All round her were glittering honeycombs of glass, forming thousands and tens of thousands of hexagonal cells. They were laced together with clusters of pipes and bundles of wiring, and each cell was large enough to hold a human being.

And each cell did. There they were, sleeping all around her, the thousands of colonists to whom Earth was still, in literal truth, a memory of yesterday. What were they dreaming, less than half-way through their three-hundred-year sleep? Did the brain dream at all, in this dim no-man's-land between life and death?

Narrow, endless belts, fitted with hand-holds every few feet, were strung across the face of the honeycomb. Leon grabbed one of these, and let it tow them swiftly past the great mosaic of hexagons.

Twice they changed direction, switching from one belt to another, until at last they must have been a full quarter of a mile from the point where they had started.

Leon released his grip, and they drifted to rest beside one cell no different from all the myriads of others. But as Lora saw the expression on Leon's face, she knew why he had brought her here, and knew that her battle was already lost.

The girl floating in her crystal coffin had a face that was not beautiful, but was full of character and intelligence. Even in this centuries-long repose, it showed determination and resourcefulness. It was the face of a pioneer, of a frontierswoman who could stand beside her mate and help him wield whatever fabulous tools of science might be needed to build a new Earth beyond the stars.

For a long time, unconscious of the cold, Lora stared down at the sleeping rival who would never know of her existence. Had any love, she wondered, in the whole history of the world, ever ended in so strange a place?

At last she spoke, her voice hushed as if she feared to wake these slumbering legions.

"Is she your wife?"

Leon nodded.

"I'm sorry, Lora. I never intended to hurt you . . ."

"It doesn't matter now. It was my fault too." She paused, and looked more closely at the sleeping woman. "And your child as well?"

"Yes; it will be born three months after we land."

How strange to think of a gesta-

tion that would last three hundred years! Yet it was all part of the same pattern; and that, she knew now, was a pattern that had no place for her.

These patient multitudes would haunt her dreams for the rest of her life; as the crystal trapdoor closed behind her, and warmth crept back into her body, she wished that the cold that had entered her heart could be so easily dispelled. One day, perhaps, it would be; but many days and many lonely nights must pass ere that time came.

She remembered nothing of the journey back through the labyrinth of corridors and echoing chambers; it took her by surprise when she found herself once more in the cabin of the little ferry ship that had brought them up from Thalassa. Leon walked over to the controls, made a few adjustments, but did not sit down.

"Good-bye, Lora," he said. "My work is done. It would be better if I stayed here." He took her hands in his; and now, in the last moment they would ever have together, there were no words that she could say. She could not even see his face for the tears that blurred her vision.

His hands tightened once, then relaxed. He gave a strangled sob, and when she could see clearly again, the cabin was empty.

A long time later a smooth, synthetic voice announced from the control board "We have landed; please leave by the forward airlock." The pattern of opening doors guided her steps, and presently she was looking out into the busy

clearing she had left a lifetime ago.

A small crowd was watching the ship with attentive interest, as if it had not landed a hundred times before. For a moment she did not understand the reason; then Clyde's voice roared "Where is he? I've had enough of this!"

In a couple of bounds he was up the ramp and had gripped her roughly by the arm. "Tell him to come out like a man!"

Lora shook her head listlessly.

"He's not here," she answered. "I've said good-bye to him. I'll never see him again."

Clyde stared at her disbelievingly, then saw that she spoke the truth. In the same moment she crumbled into his arms, sobbing as if her heart would break. As she collapsed, his anger too collapsed within him, and all that he had intended to say to her vanished from his mind. She belonged to him again; there was nothing else that mattered now.

FOR ALMOST fifty hours the geyser roared off the coast of Thalassa until its work was done. All the island watched, through the lenses of the television cameras, the shaping of the iceberg that would rise ahead of the *Magellan* on her way to the stars. Might the new shield serve her better, prayed all who watched, than the one she had brought from Earth. The great cone of ice was itself protected, during these few hours while it was close to Thalassa's sun, by a paper-thin screen of polished metal that kept it always in shadow. The

sun-shade would be left behind as soon as the journey began; it could not be needed in the interstellar wastes.

The last day came and went; Lora's heart was not the only one to feel sadness now as the sun went down and the men from Earth made their final farewells to the world they would never forget—and which their sleeping friends would never remember. In the same swift silence with which it had first landed, the gleaming egg lifted from the clearing, dipped for a moment in salutation above the village, and climbed back into its natural element. Then Thalassa waited.

The night was shattered by a soundless detonation of light. A point of pulsing brilliance no larger than a single star had banished all the hosts of heaven and now dominated the sky, far outshining the pale disc of Selene and casting sharp-edged shadows on the ground, shadows that moved even as one watched. Up there on the borders of space the fires that powered the suns themselves were burning now, preparing to drive the star-ship out into immensity on the last leg of her interrupted journey.

Dry-eyed, Lora watched the silent glory on which half her heart was riding out towards the stars. She was drained of emotion now; if she had tears, they would come later.

Was Leon already sleeping, or was he looking back upon Thalassa, thinking of what might have been? Asleep or waking, what did it matter now . . .

She felt Clyde's arms close around her, and welcomed their comfort against the loneliness of space. This was where she belonged; her heart would not stray again. *Goodbye, Leon—may you be happy on that far world which you and your children will conquer for mankind. But think of me sometimes, two hundred years behind you on the road to Earth.*

She clung fiercely to the strong arms that enfolded her, and felt against her cheek the beating of Clyde's heart—the heart that belonged to her and which she would never spurn again. Out of the silence of the night there came a sudden, long-drawn sigh from the watching thousands, and she knew that the *Magellan* had sunk out of sight below the edge of the world. **END**

In science the man of real genius is the man who invents a new method. The notable discoveries are often made by his successors, who can apply the method with fresh vigor, unimpaired by the previous labor of perfecting it.

—Bertrand Russell

At the moment, humanity is rather like an irresponsible child who has been presented with a set of machine tools, a box of matches and a supply of dynamite.

—Julien Huxley

GIFT HORSE

There she was—mysterious but beautiful,

and for the taking. Where the ship came from, no one asked.

As for where she was going, no one . . .

WE WERE a poverty-stricken bunch on Dunsinane, although this was no fault of our own. Ever since its founding, the colony had been unlucky. To begin with, there were metals in quantities sufficient only for local use. There were no indigenous flora and fauna which, considered as foodstuffs, would be so exotic as to command fancy prices in the luxury markets throughout the Galaxy. Then it had taken a long while, too long a

while, for the Terran animals and plants, introduced when the colony was started, to gain a foothold—the original ecological survey had been criminally haphazard and all manner of viruses, moulds and rusts had been overlooked. Then there were the earthquakes . . .

And the droughts . . .

And the floods . . .

All in all, we were a poverty-stricken bunch, and the onerous freight charges that we had to pay

BY BERTRAM CHANDLER



Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

on all goods shipped to and from Dunsinane kept us so. We had to export in order to pay for imported essentials—and by the time the Interstellar Transport Commission had taken its whack there were few essentials that we could afford. The rest we had to do without.

We were in no mood, therefore, to look in the mouth of any gift horse sent trotting our way by Providence.

The Gift Horse—that's what we called her. Ogilvy, the Headmaster of the Port Macbeth Academy, wanted her called *Birnam Wood*—after all, he argued, she had come to Dunsinane. But *Gift Horse* she was dubbed almost from the very beginning, and the name stuck. Governor Smith broke a bottle of our very inferior whiskey over her bows when she was ready for Space after her refit, and *Gift Horse* was what he officially christened her.

I wasn't the first one to see her, but I was the second.

I was working late in my office at the spaceport that night—the Commission's freighter, *Epsilon Lyrae*, which we nicknamed "*Epileptic Liar*", had pushed off that afternoon for Elsinore and had left behind more paperwork than cargo. I needn't have worked late—her next call wasn't due for all of six weeks—but I wanted to have the following day free for work on my small holding. That was the way all of us on Dunsinane lived. We did the clerical work necessary to hold the fabric of civilization together, but in all the time that we could spare from such essentially unproductive labors we were far-

mers and artisans.

Anyhow, I was working late, and cursing the Purser of the "*Epileptic Liar*" for having not done all the things that he should have done to make my task easier. I was a Purser myself until I met Judith—she was a hostess in the Alpha Class liner in which I was serving—and decided that life in deep space was no life for a civilized man and woman. The same can be said for life in the Shakespearean colonies—but we didn't know that when we made our decision to give the interstellar ships away and become colonists.

I was still wrestling with the manifest—it didn't check at all with the bills of lading—when the buzzer of my desk 'phone sounded. I flipped the switch over and the little screen lit up. I saw the fat, usually placid face of Bill Higgins, our chief radar operator. It was the first time that I'd ever seen him excited.

"Ken," he said, "come to the radar office, will you?"

"What for?" I asked.

"We've acquired a satellite," he said.

"Must be the "*Epileptic Liar*" come back for something. Perhaps her Purser's decided that he'd better finish all the paper work he wished on to me."

"It's not the "*Epileptic Liar*. I tracked her until she went into interstellar drive. She's well on her way to Port Hamlet. Come over, Ken. I want a witness before I start raising the alarm."

I wasn't sorry to leave my papers. I walked out of the office, into

the open air. I looked up at the sky, half expecting to see something. There was nothing visible to the naked eye, of course. All that I could see were the sparse stars and the great gulfs of emptiness between them—at this time of the year the huge, luminescent lens that was the Galaxy set shortly after the sun. The absence of stars made the night—although this was only subjective—very cold as well as very dark.

It was dark and cold in the radar office, too. Only one screen was in use, and the bulky figure of Bill Higgins was hunched over it. He stood up as I approached.

"Do you see it?" he asked, moving to one side.

I looked at the screen. I saw a little blob of light that could have been anything.

"There's something there," I said.

"Too right there's something there. Range one thousand miles—straight up. And it's in a twenty four orbit over Port Macbeth."

"It must be a ship," I said brightly.

"Yes, but *what* ship? I've called them on every frequency known to man, and a few that aren't, and got no reply."

"It still could be *Epsilon Lyrae*. Whatever accident forced her to return could have put her radio out of kilter. What about psionic communications? Have you called Templar out?"

Like most radio specialists Higgins had nothing but contempt for the so-called psionic radio and for the trained telepaths who were its operators. He let me go to the

'phone and dial Templar's number. He let me explain to Templar what it was all about. He told me, when Templar was on the way, to keep the Psionic Communications Officer out of the radar office.

I met Templar outside. We went straight to his own office. The sight of the big organic brain—grown from tissue from the brain of a dog it was—gave me, as it always did, the creeps. Templar patted the glass dome and said, "Hello, Fido old boy." He did all the things necessary to bring the organic amplifier from sleep into wakefulness, then put on the elaborate headset and relaxed in the deep armchair.

I sat in a less comfortable chair and waited. I listened to the sigh and gurgle of the pumps as they kept Fido supplied with oxygen and nutrient solution. I watched Templar's thin lips moving as he muttered something. I strained my ears to hear what it was. All I heard was, "*Calling . . . Calling . . .*"

"Any reply?" I asked.

"No. There's . . . something there. But it's faint, vague. The ghost of a thought . . ."

"Are you sure it's not *Epsilon Lyrae*?"

"She would answer me at once."

"Not if her operators are dead or unconscious."

"How does *Epsilon Lyrae* bear from here?" he asked me.

I got Higgins on the 'phone, asked him for an estimated line of bearing. Templar swivelled his chair—it was mounted on a turntable—to my directions. I saw his lips moving again.

"*Epsilon Lyrae* answering," he

said, after a brief pause.

"So it's not them hanging over the spaceport?"

"No. They want to know what we want."

"Tell them you're testing," I said. "Just testing."

"What about the . . . the whatever it is?"

"Don't say anything about it. It's our business, not the Commission's."

Somehow, the thought of salvage had already flickered across my mind. We, the Colony, could use the proceeds of salvage, and it would have been foolish to throw our prize, whatever it was, into the laps of the Commission and the crew of the *Epileptic Liar*.

I went back to see Bill Higgins, and we decided it was time we got old Captain Sorensen, the Port Master, out of his bed.

WITH DAYLIGHT the Mount McDuff Observatory turned its big reflector on to the azimuth and altitude given the astronomers by Higgins, and confirmed our suspicions that the mysterious object was a spaceship. They couldn't tell us much more. They could tell us no more than that the vessel seemed to be midway in size between one of the Commission's Gamma Class and one of the Delta Class. They didn't think that she was either a Huqua or a Shaara ship, but they couldn't be sure.

Was the ship manned? That was the problem.

She must have approached Dunsinane under interstellar drive, reverting to normal space-time when

almost within the outer atmosphere. She must have used interplanetary drive to establish herself in her orbit—although, unluckily, nobody happened to be looking at the sky at the time. On the other hand, she answered no signals whatsoever—neither radio, psionic radio nor light.

Mid morning, there was a conference in Captain Sorensen's office. Governor Smith was there, together with a half dozen members of the Legislative Council. Higgins was there. Templar was there. I was there.

It was Sorensen who kept harping on the fact that the strange ship was probably in distress, and that we should endeavor to go to her aid. He pointed out that we had one barely spaceworthy vessel at our disposal—a Spurling Six with rocket drive instead of the more usual jets. He said that even though he had been planetbound for years he was still capable of simple piloting. There were three spacesuits in the spaceport stores, and if two volunteers would step forward . . .

Everybody stepped forward, including the Governor.

Sorensen decided, wisely, to make his choice of companions from among those who had several years of deep space experience, which disqualified most of those present. Higgins, Templar and myself—ex-spacemen all—matched coins to see which of us would have the privilege. On the first attempt we all turned up heads. On the second attempt Higgins and I had heads, Templar's coin showed a tail.

The Port Master—and he had no shortage of willing helpers—organized the readying of the Spurling for space. Higgins and I went to the stores for the spacesuits. They hadn't been used for years. Luckily we were able to get full oxygen cylinders from the spaceport engineering shop. We were able, after a struggle with our memories, to go through the full testing procedure.

While all this was happening I had, of course, found time to keep in touch with Judith. I wasn't surprised when Higgins and I—fully suited except for our helmets—walked to where the vicious looking little Spurling was standing on the apron to see her among the crowd around the aircraft.

She said, "Be careful, Ken."

"You were shipmates with me long enough to know that I'm always careful," I told her.

"That was in a real ship," she said, "not a garbage can with rockets."

Sorensen glared at her from under his bushy white brows.

"If you've *quite* finished, Mr. Chambers, you might help me on with my suit."

I kissed Judith hastily. With Bill Higgins assisting, I eased the bulk of the Port Master into his spacesuit. The three of us put our helmets on—the Spurling's cabin was supposed to be hermetically sealed, but it wouldn't have held small coal. In any case, the inner door of the little airlock had been missing for quite some time.

Bill and I climbed into the Spurling first, took our seats at the rear

of the cabin. Captain Sorensen followed us, wedged himself into the pilot's chair. He ran his heavy gloves over the controls, satisfied himself that they would not affect his manual dexterity too badly. Outside we could see the Spaceport Police clearing the field for our take-off.

The Old Man took us up in a hurry. He had to, to conserve fuel—the Spurling's fuel tanks had never been designed for actual spatial maneuvering. He didn't bother with the turret drive, he just turned her until her nose was pointing straight up. In seconds we were through the thin, high cirrus and the sky had changed from blue to black. It seemed only a few more seconds, although it must have been longer, when the drive was cut and we were falling weightless around Dunsinane, in a rough approximation of a twenty four hour orbit. The longest part of the whole business was the visual search for the strange ship. We found her at last, gleaming like a star in the sunlight. My body ached as Sorensen nudged us towards her with short, vicious stabs of rocket blast. It had been so long since I had been in Space that the first acceleration had hit me badly.

We matched velocities with the stranger. We looked at her. She was a big brute, bigger than the old "*Epileptic Liar*." She had the vanes and the slender, needle prowed form that showed that she had been designed for landings and blastings off in an atmosphere. Her shell plating—at least, to my unpracticed eye—was in good condition, bore

none of the pitting and scarring that must occur during years spent in allegedly empty Space, with descents and take-offs through planetary atmospheres.

There was the usual greenhouse in the nose. There was a name just below the big windows—but it was in no script with which we were familiar. It wasn't in the Terran alphabet, neither was it in either Huqua or Shaara. It was like some of the more abstruse symbols used by the mathematicians.

There was an airlock where one would expect an airlock to be—about two thirds of the way between nose and tail. The big, round door was open. I shivered. It looked too much like an open mouth, gaping wide to swallow us. I said as much.

Sorensen laughed, making my helmet 'phones crackle.

"So it does," he said. "So it does. But we mustn't look a gift horse in the mouth."

"A gift horse, Captain?" asked Higgins.

"Yes—a gift horse. A spaceship's just what we've been wanting for years—and now we've got one."

"But she's not ours," I said. "And what about her crew?"

"Damn the crew," he replied. "Oh, I'm sorry for them, *something* must have happened to them—didn't you notice that *both* airlock doors were open? That ship's deserted."

"All artifacts of Extra-Terran origin are the property of the Institute of Extra-Terran Arts and Sciences," I reminded him.

"Like hell! This is a *ship*, man—

not a bloody artifact. I don't know how she got here, or from where, but we can use her. We'll be able to run the Commission out of the Shakespearean Sector. We'll do all the fetching and carrying between Dunsinane and Elsinore and Venice and Illyria and Philippi—at freight rates that our fellow colonists can afford to pay."

"But she can't be deserted," said Higgins.

"There's only one way to find out," said the Old Man.

He was the first across from the Spurling to the ship, using the little rocket unit that was part of his suit equipment. He paid out his lifeline as he went. Once inside the airlock he pulled the Spurling to the ship. She crumpled her starboard wing rather badly coming alongside, and I remember wondering how we would ever get back to Dunsinane—and Dunsinane was such a long way down. I looked at the cloudy, ocean girdled globe and shuddered.

We made the Spurling fast alongside the stranger. Then Bill and I joined Sorensen in the airlock. It was like the airlocks of all the ships that we had ever known—but there is, after all, only one way to make an efficient airlock.

By the light of our torches we prowled through the empty alleyways, the deserted compartments. The more we saw the more we were convinced that the owners—or the late owners—of the vessel had been an essentially humanoid race. Everything was to the right scale. The chairs in the Control Room could have been designed for human

bodies. The controls themselves must have been designed for something very like the human hand.

Sorensen made a careful inspection of the controls.

"This," he said, "must be the pilot's chair. The big, red key must actuate the main drive, the smaller ones the auxiliaries. That screen will be a radar altimeter, and the other one a drift indicator. These *could* be the gyroscope controls . . ."

He prodded a button with a thick, gloved forefinger. He swore as a low humming sound, rising rapidly to a whine, was audible, transmitted to us through the metal of hull and decks, and bulkheads, through the metallic soles of our boots. Outside the big ports the stars were wheeling in slow procession, the stars and the huge lens of the Galaxy.

Sorensen prodded other buttons, frantically. The whining stopped, but the ship was still swinging.

"There must be power in the batteries still," he muttered.

"Why not?" asked Higgins. "And why shouldn't the Pile be alive, too? Everything must have been working for her to get here. There's no reason to suppose that nothing is working is now."

By the time that we had decided that everything was working, the insides of our suits were clammy and foul, and we were tired and hungry. We had tried, using our suit radios, to get in touch with Port Macbeth, but without success. I was beginning to worry about Judith, knowing that she would be worried about me.

Even so, results were encour-

aging. None of us was an engineer, but we knew enough to be able to tell that both Drives, Interplanetary and Interstellar, were functioning. The Pile was alive, and there was ample propellant, if the meters on the tanks, with their alien numerals, said what we thought they said. But we had ample evidence to indicate that the builders of the ship were a right handed race. The Interstellar Drive was as near to a Mannschenn Unit as made no difference. Obviously, with its complexity of spinning wheels, it could work only on the principle of Temporal Precession. The tools in the engine-room stores were all understandable, remarkably un-alien in their construction and design.

The tools, as a matter of fact, were the only items of equipment in the ship. The other storerooms were all empty, looked as though they had never been used. The cabins were empty. There were no books or papers of any kind. The galley—there was nothing else that it could have been—bore no evidence that anybody had ever cooked anything in the electronic range.

We returned to the Control Room for a conference.

"This is the situation," said Sorensen. "We could try to straighten the Spurling's starboard wing—but, even if we did, it'll be badly weakened. I'd not guarantee a safe landing. On the other hand—I feel quite sure that I could set this ship down in one piece. All we have to do is to start the generators—I'm enough of an engineer for that—and get the controls, *all* the

controls, alive. Then I shall require at least an hour's playing around with her to get the feel of her. Then I take her down."

"But we can't notify Port Macbeth," objected Bill.

"Port Macbeth, to all practical intents and purposes, is in this Control Room, Mr. Higgins. Besides, everybody in Dunsinane will be staring at the sky, and the Observatory will see what's happening soon enough. Come on, now—we'll get the jennies started."

So we started the jennies, and we cast the poor little Spurling adrift. We found the controls for the airlock doors and we, as Captain Sorensen had put it, played around for all of an hour. By this time the air regenerating units of our suits were beginning to feel the strain, and so were we. By this time we were ceasing to worry what sort of landing we could make. As far as I was concerned all that I wanted was to get the helmet off my head and get a lungful of good, clean air. All that I wanted was to feel the solid ground of Dunsinane under my feet. All that I wanted was a surcease from the gut wrenching accelerations and decelerations. I wanted to see Judith again too—but not, I must confess, with such urgency.

We fell, at last, through the evening sky, the ship almost obedient to the touch of Sorensen's big hands, with Bill and I prompting his memory as to which control was which, which symbol meant what. We fell, they told us, like a falling star, the glare of our rockets intolerably bright in the evening

sky. Even so, we hit the apron almost as lightly as the proverbial falling feather—and stumbled from the ship to face the levelled rifles of the Spaceport Police and the volunteers, who dropped their rifles to cheer when we threw off our helmets and were recognized.

It was a homecoming that made the danger and hardship worthwhile.

THERE WAS little time to rest, almost no time to tell Judith of our discoveries. A meeting of the Council was convened for that very night and, of course, Sorensen, Higgins and myself had to appear before it to say our pieces. The decision of the Council was unanimous. After all, we were a poverty-stricken bunch on Dunsinane and ethics, to us, were an expensive luxury, and the laws and rules made by somebody on Earth, parsecs away, were made, we all felt, to be ignored.

We didn't know where the ship had come from—for all we knew she could have drifted from some other Galaxy. We didn't know what had happened to her crew—it seemed to us that she had never been manned. We didn't know of what value she would be to the Institute of Extra-Terran Arts and Sciences—although we could make a conservative guess—but we did know, only too well, of what value she would be to us. What the Institute never knew would never worry its corporate mind.

Other colonies, other planet states throughout the Galaxy owned

and operated their own ships, but they had been rich enough to buy them. We weren't rich, and never would be rich, and we could not afford to look our big, beautiful, shining gift horse in the mouth. That is what we decided to call her—the *Gift Horse*. The meeting finished with all of us drinking toasts to the beast in New Caledon whiskey—it was far better than our own—that Governor Smith had produced for the occasion.

That was the end of the talking; the next day the work started. Our main trouble was that we had so very few ex-spacemen among us. There was Captain Sorensen, of course, and there were Higgins and Templar, the two communications specialists. There was Judith—although she had sailed only as hostess, she had her Catering Officer's Certificate. There was Harry Hawkins, who ran the Port Macbeth engineering shop. He had been a Junior Engineer—reaction—in the Commission's ships and had an Interstellar Endorsement to his Second's ticket. He knew nothing of the theory of the Mannschenn Drive—all that he knew was how to trace faults and check circuits.

We found a Doctor Calver among the staff of the Observatory who thought that he would be able to handle interstellar navigation. We found a professor of biology at the Academy who was confident that he would be able to look after the yeasts and algae upon which we should depend both for food and atmosphere. We found a few bright boys from the airlines who thought that they should have been

spacemen, not airmen, and who, surprisingly enough, were willing to learn.

Sorensen, of course, was to be Master, and Hawkins the engineer, handling both reaction and interstellar drives. Calver was to be navigator and Hawkins' assistant so far as the Mannschenn Drive was concerned. Mackay, the professor from the Academy, was elected Bio-Chemist. Higgins and Templar were to be communications officers. I was the obvious choice for Purser, just as Judith was for the position of Chief Steward. We had no trouble in filling the other, less specialized vacancies.

Meanwhile, the work of fitting out the *Gift Horse* continued day and night. We had no time to lose. We wanted to get her out into Space before the Commission's *Epsilon Lyrae* came bumbling along on her appointed rounds. We wanted to carry our first load from Dunsinane to Elsinore, from Elsinore to Illyria, to Venice and Philippi so that the opposition would be greeted with empty warehouses and a paucity of customers. We didn't know where she had come from, and by this time we didn't care. She was *our* ship.

She was, to a surprising extent, only the shell of a ship—and that made our task so much easier. We were able to install the algae tanks and yeast vats in positions to suit ourselves and not the whim of some Commission draughtsman huddled over his drawing board. Not that there were many whims in the design of the Commission's ships—it was just that such-and-

such had always lived in so-and-so space, and always would live there, the convenience of her crew and passengers notwithstanding.

The airline pilots took her lifeboats—the fact that they were still in their nests was one of the puzzling features—and played with them outside the atmosphere and got the feel of handling a ship in a vacuum. The rest of us were planet-bound—but it was only temporary. We pushed on with our tasks, and it was a day ahead of schedule that the Governor, perched precariously a-top the scaffolding, broke the ceremonial bottle of whiskey over *Gift Horse's* bow.

It was two days later that we were ready for the blast-off. We were a full ship insofar as the passenger accommodation was concerned. Most of our novice spacemen were married, and it had been decided to give their wives a holiday jaunt around the other worlds of the Shakespearean Sector. Sorensen didn't like it, complaining that enough things could go wrong on a maiden voyage without having a parcel of women cluttering up the ship. He was over-ruled by the Governor himself.

Our cargo spaces were far from full. We had so little to export from our world. There were the bags of mail to the other planetary systems. There was a prize ram, with two ewes, for Elsinore. There were a dozen or so bales of sheepskins for Illyria and a shipment of whiskey for Venice, whose attempts at the manufacture of potables had failed even more dismally than had our own. There was a rooster and a half

dozen hens for somebody on Philippi. Unfortunately they did not survive the initial acceleration.

It was a fine morning when we blasted off. There was bright bunting all over the spaceport, and the Police Band was playing us off. I remember *The Road To The Isles* and, as the airlock doors were closing, the inevitable *Auld Lang Syne*. I remember, too, *Will Ye No' Come Back Again?* and how Judith said that they might have played something a little less ominous.

I remember how stiff and self-conscious the new hands looked in their new uniforms as they paraded before the Governor, and how much at home the old hands looked in theirs, with the tarnished braid and badges. I remember the cheers, and the slow booming of the saluting cannon that Hawkins' men in the shop had found time to make, somehow, in spite of the fact that they had been working on the ship every waking hour.

I remember how we marched up the ramp to the airlock, striding in time to the skirling of the pipes and the throbbing of the drums. Then we were busy, except for the deadheads. The navigational, engineering and communications staff went straight to their stations. Judith and I were busy, too—we worked together, seeing that all the passengers were strapped safely in their acceleration couches. We got to our own cabin just as Sorensen's voice was coming over the intercom: "Thirty seconds to blast-off! Twenty . . . Fifteen . . . Ten . . ."

We were lifting then, and the giant hand of inertia was pressing

us down into the padding. We were lifting, and I could hear, even above the roar of the rockets, the usual, disquieting noises inevitable at the beginning of any voyage, even with the most highly trained crew. There is always something insecurely fastened that will carry away from a bulkhead. There is always something in a state of unstable equilibrium that will fall. There is always at least one substandard light fitting that will shatter. There is always somebody—and it isn't always a woman—who will panic and scream.

The Old Man's voice came through the speakers. Judging from the sound of it he had been having as bad a time as anybody, probably worse. He was old, and fat, and in no condition to take the strains and stresses of spaceship handling. Although, I reflected, he had shown no signs of wear and tear after we had brought the *Gift Horse* in. It must be, I decided, emotion. After years ashore he was once again Master of a ship in deep space.

"Stand by for Free Fall," he said slowly.

The rockets died.

"The vessel will be proceeding under Interstellar Drive within a few minutes," said Sorensen. "Those of you who wish may proceed to the lounge. Mr. and Mrs. Chambers will explain to you what is happening and will answer any questions you care to ask."

"He means that we'll try to explain and try to answer their questions," said Judith, unbuckling her straps.

"I never noticed you at a loss

for an answer when we were in the old *Beta Virginis*," I told her.

"Or I you," she replied. "I remember that physicist we carried—what was his name?—told me that he had never been so entertained in all his life as he was by your explanation of the working of the Drive . . ."

"I remember," I said. "That . . . wolf!"

"You had no need to worry," she smiled. "I was known among the girls as the virgin of the *Virgin Betty*!"

We floated out into the alleyway, pulled ourselves along the guide rails to the lounge. About two thirds of our deadhead passengers were there. The others, doubtless, were being sick. I hoped that Judith's two assistants—airlines hostesses they had been—weren't being sick themselves.

There was the usual cry of wonderment as the shutters slid aside from the huge windows. We all looked out. There lay Dunsinane, a huge globe, all green and brown and blue, with the light of Macbeth, our primary, reflected brilliantly from the Polar icecaps and the summits of the high, snow covered mountains of the Malcolm Range.

Beyond Dunsinane was the blackness of intergalactic space, broken only by the sparse, dim nebulosities that were other galaxies, that were island universes. I wondered from which of them *Gift Horse* had come. I wondered why she had come. I wondered what we would do and say when her rightful owners confronted us and accused us

of stealing their ship.

"Mr. Chambers," said somebody.

I turned round. It was pretty little Mrs. Mackay, the Bio-Chemist's wife. Somebody should have told her, I thought, that a wide skirt is not the ideal garment to wear during Free Fall. I was rather glad that nobody had.

"Mr. Chambers," she said again, "the Captain said that you'd answer any questions we had. The Purser of the boat I came out on did tell me about the Mannschenn Drive, but I'm afraid that he wasn't very clear . . ."

"First of all," I said, raising my voice a little for the benefit of anybody else who might be listening, "the ship has to be pointed the right way. Sometimes this is done by cutting the reaction drive—the rockets—and swinging the ship on her gyroscopes and then cutting in the reaction drive again for a few minutes. The best, and the least wasteful way—as far as reaction mass is concerned—is to blast off at just the right time so that the ship is pointed the right way to start with. That's what the Captain did. We're pointed directly at Hamlet.

"Now, the Drive itself. Everybody knows that a spinning gyroscope will precess at right angles to an applied force. It was Mannschenn who discovered the principle of what is called Temporal Precession, who induced a gyroscope to precess at right angles to the three dimensions of Space. The precession, of course, still takes place within the framework of the space-time continuum . . ."

"A sort of time machine!" she said.

"No. It's *not* a Time Machine."

"But the Purser of *Epsilon Lyrae* told me that the ship was going ahead in space and astern in time."

"You can't go astern in time," I said. "Oh, I know that there have been stories written in which the Drive, either by accident or on purpose, has been used as a time machine—but you've only to think about it to see how utterly impossible it is. Once you have time travel you get involved in a mess of absolutely insoluble paradoxes. You go back and you murder your great grandfather—thus automatically cancelling yourself out. So, if you never existed, you couldn't go back in time to murder your great grandfather. But if you haven't murdered your great grandfather you *do* exist after all. Do you see?"

"No," said Judith, who had joined the audience. "But carry on, darling."

"But he's making it all so clear, Mrs. Chambers," said Mrs. Mackay.

"Is he?"

"Anyhow," I said, "it takes some few minutes to warm the Drive up. You can hear the gyroscopes that are its essential guts humming now. Once the precession starts you'll see the stars—what few stars we can see from here—fade and vanish. You'll see Dunsinane vanish. Navigation will no longer be visual, but will be entirely by instruments, by the mass detectors and such. We shall see nothing further until we return to normal space-time in the neighborhood of Hamlet. Then

we shall come in to Elsinore on rocket drive."

"Normal space-time?" asked Mrs. Mackay. "But you said that the so-called Temporal Precession took place within the framework of the space-time continuum."

I noted with relief that the humming of the Drive had risen to an almost supersonic whine.

"What I meant was," I said, speaking with deliberate slowness, "was . . ."

"Stand by for Interstellar Drive!" barked Sorensen's voice from the bulkhead speaker. "Stand by for Interstellar Drive!"

HAVE YOU ever tried to swim in molasses?

That's what it was like as I made my slow and painful way through alleyways and along the axial shaft to Control. There was something wrong with the Drive, something very badly wrong with the Drive, and we all knew it. Perhaps the passengers wouldn't have realized it, at first, had not Hawkins, his face white and strained and dripping with perspiration, passed through the lounge on his laborious journey to Control, had he not returned, minutes later, with a worried and scared looking Calver in tow.

We got the passengers back into their cabins, Judith and I, and saw that they were securely strapped into their bunks. Then I decided to see Sorensen to ask what was wrong. We had heard nothing over the intercom, and all our attempts to get into touch with Control by

its use had failed. And there was something wrong with the lights. They were burning dimly, with a feeble radiance that was so close to the infra-red that it made no appreciable difference. There was light a-plenty from the pearly glow that streamed in through the still unshuttered ports.

My journey to Control seemed to take years. How long it took in actuality I don't know. There are so many different kinds of time. But I got there at last, pulled myself into the compartment through the open hatchway.

Sorensen was there, strapped into his chair, staring out through the viewports at the luminous emptiness. The three ex-airmen were there, looking, in spite of their spacemen's uniforms, like fish out of water. One of them was huddled over the Mass Detector.

"There's nothing!" he was crying hysterically. "There's *nothing!*"

"Captain Sorensen!" I said. "What's happened? What's wrong?"

The old man turned his head slowly.

"I wish I knew, Chambers," he said. "All I can tell you is this—but don't say anything to the passengers yet—all I can tell you is this; the Drive's taken charge."

I remembered the stories and the legends of which I had made such fun when I was explaining the Drive to Mrs. Mackay—how long ago? I thought of time cycles and paradoxes. I thought of *Gift Horse* as a sort of Flying Dutchman of Space, with ourselves condemned to wander through and around and

outside the Continuum for all eternity.

"Are we headed for the Past?" I asked. "But that's impossible."

"I know damn' well that it's impossible!" he barked, with a return to his old irascibility. "It always was impossible, and it is still impossible. So we aren't doing it."

"Then what are we doing?"

"I . . . don't . . . know. Hawkins doesn't know. Calver doesn't know. All that I know is this—we should have tried to get hold of a properly qualified Mannschenn engineer. All that I know is this—we should have looked our gift horse in the mouth before riding off on her. Gift horse? She's a Trojan Horse in reverse!"

Hawkins came in to Control. He looked even more frightened than when I had seen him last.

"Well, Mr. Hawkins?" asked Sorensen. "Or is it not well?"

"It's not, Captain. There were no faults when we blasted off—I'll swear to that. There was nothing wrong with the circuits. But the controls burned out almost immediately after we got her started—they could almost have been booby trapped. They *were* booby trapped. And . . . and . . ."

"And what, Mr. Hawkins?"

"I can't believe it myself, but Dr. Calver says it's so. She's running in reverse!"

There was a long silence.

Then! "Get hold of Higgins and Templar," the Old Man told me. "Tell them to try their damndest to get in touch with somebody somewhere, somehow . . ."

But Higgins' receivers were dead,

as was all his apparatus. And Templar I found unconscious and Fido, the organic psionic amplifier, was no more than a mass of corruption in its tank. I found the Doctor, and we revived Templar. All he could tell us was that he had been hit by an overwhelming wave of age and tiredness. It had been, he said, like the entire Galaxy crying out for rest, for a surcease from labor. It had been too much for him.

There was nothing now, he said. There was nothing.

Nothing.

LOOKING BACK, I am still surprised that not one of us thought of making a finish to it all. Perhaps some of us did think of it but, if so, the idea never got past the thinking stage. Our only salvation, I am convinced, was the women. They let us console ourselves with the thought that, no matter where—or when—we finished up we could become the Adams and Eves of a new race. Too, there was the urge to carry on to see what would happen next. I know that already detailed plans were being made to consider the ship as a closed, ecological unit capable of functioning as such for an indefinite period of time.

So we kept going. Sorensen gave Calver and Hawkins strict instructions not to do anything—*anything*—to the Drive until they were sure what they were doing. Committees for this, that and the other were organized. An amateur theatrical society came into being, and a string

quartet. The almost lost art of writing was revived. Until something happened—or until Hawkins and Calver made something happen—we were a world, even though a pitifully small one.

We adjusted ourselves to the effects of the field of the Drive—after all, the human animal can adjust itself to almost anything. We lived our not unhappy lives. We saw to it that there was work for everybody. Never, in all the history of Man the Navigator, has the inside of a ship shone as did the interior of *Gift Horse*. We had alcohol to take the sharp edge off our doubts and fears and forebodings—Mackay saw to that. As a brewer and as a distiller he was a first class Bio-Chemist—even so, his “Gift Horse Vodka” was a boon and a blessing.

We had all, I suppose, settled down quite comfortably, almost happily, when the Drive stopped. It happened without warning, at a time when Hawkins and Calver were in Control discussing matters with Sorensen and his senior officers. The sudden cessation of the high-pitched whine was as nerve shattering as an explosion would have been. It was some time before any of us thought to look out of the ports, before any of us looked at the instruments.

The shining haze was gone, as though it never had been.

Outside was blackness—a blackness more intense than any of us had ever known, broken—and intensified by a pitiful scattering of dim, faint stars. Outside was a feebly glowing red sun. Outside was

a planet, even at this range obviously desolate, even at this range no more than a ball of ice and desert sand.

The meeting broke up suddenly. Hawkins and Calver scurried out of Control, followed closely by Higgins and Templar. Judith and I remained.

The intercom was working again.

“Calver here,” came the scientist’s dry voice. “The Mannschenn Drive Unit has burned itself out. It can never be repaired.”

“Tell Hawkins to speak to me,” said Sorensen crisply. “Mr. Hawkins—Reaction Drive stations!”

“Reaction Drive stations it is, sir!”

“Communications to Control. Templar here. There’s something, somebody, on that planet. It’s not quite alien, but . . .”

“Radio Communications to Control. Higgins here, Captain. I’m in touch with them, whoever they are. They speak English. I’ll switch you through.”

“Calling starship,” came a flat voice. “Calling starship. Come in, please.”

“Starship *Gift Horse* here,” replied the Old Man. “Sorensen, Master. Who are you? Where are we?”

“Prepare for landing, Captain Sorensen. Prepare for landing. Follow the beam in.”

“Why the hell should we land?” exploded Sorensen.

“You have nowhere else to go, Captain. You have no Interstellar Drive.”

“Suppose we don’t want to land?”

"We are quite capable of coming to fetch you in, Captain. Furthermore, we would point out that your ship was built to withstand aging stresses for a limited period only, and that, according to our calculations, only a few hours of life remain to her."

"*They* built the ship," muttered the Old Man. "*They* know what they put into her . . . They're not bluffing—or are they?" He shrugged his thick shoulders. "All right," he said. "All right, whoever you are. We're coming down." To us he said, "Landing Stations."

I should have gone back into the accommodation with Judith to help control the passengers. But I wanted so to watch what was happening. I made myself as small and as inconspicuous as possible, and hoped that Captain Sorensen wouldn't see me and chase me out of Control.

The descent was routine enough—swinging *Gift Horse* on her gyroscopes, braking her with brief rocket blasts. We fell rapidly at first, and abruptly the world beneath us was no longer a globe but a huge bowl into which we were falling. We heard the thin, high keening as the first molecules of atmosphere swept up and past our hull. We felt the rise in internal temperature.

And then we slowed. Carefully the Old Man brought her down, carefully, carefully, riding the beam in. I looked at the screen to see what it was to which we were falling, what desolate huddle of buildings in the all pervading desert, among the low, eroded hills. I cried aloud in amazement—we were dropping to what seemed to be the

only oasis on the time-ravaged face of the planet.

We touched at last, and the silence beat at our ears with the cessation of the rockets' screaming roar. We touched at last, and I got up from my seat and looked out at the pleasant landscape—the grass, the trees, the bright flowers.

I looked at the beings who were coming towards us. There were three men in gleaming spacesuits, and following them were half a dozen wheeled machines. I was relieved when I saw no obvious weapons.

"Send for the Purser," the Old Man was saying, "and . . . Oh, you're here, Chambers."

"Yes, sir," I said.

"I see no reason to depart from standard practice," said Sorensen. "You will go down to the airlock to receive our visitors—they must be the Port officials."

"Hadn't I better wear a spacesuit, sir?"

"Yes. You'd better. They're wearing spacesuits."

"Captain Sorensen," said the radio. "Evacuate your ship at once, bringing with you such easily portable stores and baggage as you require. I assure you that the atmosphere is breathable and the temperature tolerable."

"Put on your spacesuit," said Sorensen to me. "Go down to the airlock. Find out, if you can, why *they* are wearing suits."

I put on my spacesuit—the same one that I had worn when we brought the *Gift Horse* in. I went down to the airlock. The inner door shut behind me. After a long pause,

the outer door opened. The retractable ramp reached down to the ground like a long, gleaming tongue.

The three spacesuited figures walked stiffly up the ramp. Before I could retreat two of them had seized me by the arms while the third one raised his gloved hands to twist my helmet. It came clear and free, and as I opened my mouth to shout I took a great, involuntary gasp of air. I realized, too late, what I had done. I decided that it didn't matter, and went on breathing.

Because the men in spacesuits weren't men in spacesuits at all. They were robots in human form, beautifully and cunningly made, graceful as only finely wrought metal can be graceful, their featureless heads somehow in keeping with the slender bodies.

"Welcome to Dunsinane," said one of them.

I stared at him stupidly.

"Welcome to Dunsinane," he said again.

I began to realize, then, what had happened. I saw, dimly, that we had come a long way in a long time—or should I have said a long time in a long way? I knew that we had come full circle, but that it wasn't a circle, but a spiral.

I knew that we should have looked our gift horse in the mouth.

THERE IS little left to tell.

All hands managed to get away from the ship before she crumbled into metallic dust, saving most of the stores and cargo and personal effects. We were taken to

the charming village where we still live—we and our children. We have no cause to complain of our treatment; we are waited upon hand and foot by willing slaves such as no emperor of olden times could ever have commanded. We live quite well on the fruit and the vegetables of the oasis, and on the synthetics that the robots make for us. Now and again we allow ourselves the luxury of mutton or lamb. (It is a great pity that those fowls did not survive the take-off . . .)

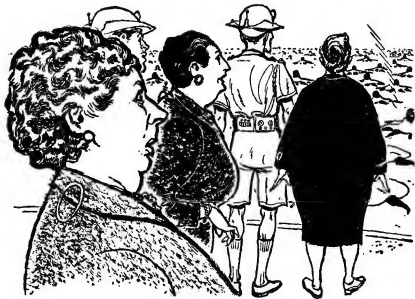
We know, too, what it was—and is—all about. It was Templar who got into touch with the . . . entity living—and I think the word "living" is justifiable—in the very heart of the planet. It is practically pure brain, says Templar, for all that it is a machine and not an organic being. Its relationship to the lesser machines on the surface is almost like that of the queen bee to the other inhabitants of the hive. Almost—because each of the lesser machines has its own intelligence, its own personality, and emotions.

They were lonely, the robots. Man had gone, vanishing from the dying, expanding Universe. Man had gone—and they, built and designed to serve Man, were faced with an eternity of frustration. They were lonely, and their Queen Mother did what she could—Templar always calls her "she"—to alleviate their loneliness. The trap was set and baited—the trap that old Sorensen so aptly called "a Trojan Horse in reverse". The trap was set and baited, and we walked into it.

(Continued on page 112)

DO UNTO OTHERS

BY MARK CLIFTON



Illustrated by Ed Emsh

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you . . . And

the natives of Capella IV, philosophers at heart,

were not ones to ignore the Golden Rule . . .

MY AUNT MATTIE, Matthewa H. Tombs, is President of the Daughters of Terra. I am her nephew, the one who didn't turn out well. Christened Hapland Graves, after Earth President Hapland, a cousin by marriage, the fellows at school naturally called me Happy Graves.

"Haphazard Graves, it should be," Aunt Mattie commented acidly the first time she heard it. It was her not very subtle way of reminding me of the way I lived my life and did things, or didn't do them. She shuddered at anything disorderly, which of course included me, and it was her beholden duty to right anything which to her appeared wrong.

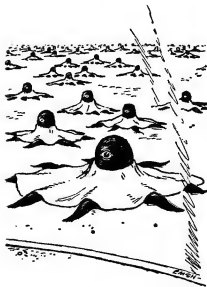
"There won't be any evil to march on after you get through, Aunt Mattie," I once said when I was a child. I like now to think that even at the age of six I must have mastered the straight face, but I'm afraid I was so awed by her that I was sincere.

"That will do, Hapland!" she said sternly. But I think she knew I meant it—then—and I think that was the day I became her favorite nephew. For some reason, never quite clear to me, she was my favorite aunt. I think she liked me most because I was the cross she had to bear. I liked her most, I'm sure, because it was such a comfortable ride.

A few billions spent around the house can make things quite comfortable.

She had need of her billions to carry out her hobbies, or, as she called it, her "life's work." Aunt Mattie always spoke in clichés because people could understand what you meant. One of these hobbies was her collection of flora of the universe. It was begun by her maternal grandfather, one of the wealthier Plots, and increased as the family fortunes were increased by her father, one of the more ruthless Tombs, but it was under Aunt Mattie's supervision that it came, so to speak, into full flower.

"Love," she would say, "means more to a flower than all



the scientific knowledge in the world." Apparently she felt that the small army of gardeners, each a graduate specialist in duplicating the right planetary conditions, hardly mattered.

The collection covered some two hundred acres in our grounds at the west side of the house. Small, perhaps, as some of the more vulgar displays by others go, but very, very choice.

The other hobby, which she combines with the first, is equally expensive. She and her club members, the Daughters of Terra (D.T.s for short), often find it necessary to take junkets on the family space yacht out to some distant planet—to straighten out reprehensible conditions which have come to her attention. I usually went along to take care of—symbolically, at least—the bags and (their) baggage.

My psychiatrist would say that expressing it in this way shows I have never outgrown my juvenile attitudes. He says I am simply a case of arrested development, mental, caused through too much overshadowing by the rest of the family. He says that, like the rest of them, I have inherited the family compulsion to make the universe over to my own liking so I can pass it on to posterity with a clear conscience, and my negative attitude toward this is simply a defense mechanism because I haven't had a chance to do it. He says I really hate my aunt's flora collection because I see it as a rival for her affection. I tell him if I have any resentments toward it at all it is for the long hours spent in getting the latinized names of things

drilled into me. I ask him why gardeners always insist on forcing long meaningless names upon non-gardeners who simply don't care. He ignores that, and says that subconsciously I hate my Aunt Mattie because I secretly recognize that she is a challenge too great for me to overcome. I ask him why, if I subconsciously hate Aunt Mattie, why I would care about how much affection she gives to her flora collection. He says, ahah! We are making progress.

He says he can't cure me—of what, I'm never clear—until I find the means to cut down and destroy my Aunt Mattie.

This is all patent nonsense because Aunt Mattie is the rock, the firm foundation in a universe of shifting values. Even her clichés are precious to me because they are unchanging. On her, I can depend.

He tells Aunt Mattie his diagnoses and conclusions, too. Unethical? Well now! Between a mere psychiatrist and my Aunt Mattie is there any doubt about who shall say what is ethical?

After one of their long conferences about me she calls me into her study, looks at me wordlessly, sadly, shakes her head, sighs—then squares her shoulders until the shelf of her broad, although maiden, bosom becomes huge enough to carry any burden, even the burden of my alleged hate. This she bears bravely, even gratefully. I might resent this needless pain the psychiatrist gives her, except that it really seems to make her happier in some obscure way.

Perhaps she has some kind of

guilt complex, and I am her deserved punishment? Aunt Mattie with a guilt complex? Never! Aunt Mattie knows she is right, and goes ahead.

So all his nonsense is completely ridiculous. I love my Aunt Mattie. I adore my Aunt Mattie. I would never do anything to hurt my Aunt Mattie.

Or, well, I didn't mean to hurt her, anyway. All I did was wink. I only meant . . .

WE WERE met at the space port of Capella IV by the planet administrator, himself, one John J. McCabe.

It was no particular coincidence that I knew him. My school was progressive. It admitted not only the scions of the established families but those of the ambitious families as well. Its graduates, naturally, went into the significant careers. Johnny McCabe was one of the ambitious ones. We hadn't been anything like bosom pals at school; but he'd been tolerant of me, and I'd admired him, and fitfully told myself I should be more like him. Perhaps this was the reason Aunt Mattie had insisted on this particular school, the hope that some of the ambition would rub off on me.

Capella IV wasn't much of a post, not even for the early stages in a young man's career, although, socially, it was perhaps the best beginning Johnny's family could have expected. It was a small planet, entirely covered by salt. Even inside the port bubble with its duplication of Earth atmosphere, the salt lay

like a permanent snow scene. Actually it was little more than a way station along the space route out in that direction, and Johnny's problems were little more than the problems of a professional host at some obscure resort. But no doubt his dad spoke proudly of "My son, a planet administrator," and when I called on the family to tell them I'd visited their son, I wouldn't be one to snitch.

There was doubt in my mind that even Johnny's ambition could make the planet into anything more than it was already. It had nothing we wanted, or at least was worth the space freight it would cost to ship it. The natives had never given us any trouble, and, up until now, we hadn't given them any. So Earth's brand upon it was simply a small bubble enclosing a landing field, a hangar for checkup and repair of ships requiring an emergency landing, some barracks for the men and women of the port personnel, a small hotel to house stranded space passengers while repairs were made to their ship, or stray V.I.P.'s.

A small administration building flying Federated Earth flag, and a warehouse to contain supplies, which had to be shipped in, completed the installation. The planet furnished man nothing but water pumped from deep in the rock strata beneath the salt, and even that had to be treated to remove enough of the saline content to make it usable. At the time, I didn't know what the natives, outside our bubble, lived on. The decision to come had been a sudden one, and

I hadn't had more than enough time to call the State Department to find out who the planet administrator might be.

I was first out of the yacht and down the landing steps to the salt covered ground. Aunt Mattie was still busy giving her ship captain his instructions, and possibly inspecting the crew's teeth to see if they'd brushed them this morning. The two members of her special committee of the D.T.'s who'd come along, a Miss Point and a Mrs. Waddle, naturally would be standing at her sides, and a half pace to the rear, to be of assistance should she need them in dealing with males.

There was a certain stiff formality in the way McCabe, flanked by his own two selected subordinates, approached the ship—until I turned around at the foot of the steps and he recognized me.

"Hap!" he yelled, then. "Happy Graves, you old son of a gun!" He broke into a run, dignity forgotten, and when he got to me he grabbed both my shoulders in his powerful hands to shake me as if he were some sort of terrier—and I a rat. His joy seemed all out of proportion until I remembered he probably hadn't seen anybody from school for a long time; and until I further remembered that he would have been alerted by the State Department to Aunt Mattie's visit and would have been looking forward to it with dread and misgivings.

To realize he had a friend at court must really have overjoyed him.

"Johnny," I said. "Long time."

It had been. Five-six years anyway. I held out my hand in the old school gesture. He let loose my shoulders and grabbed it in the traditional manner. We went through the ritual, which my psychiatrist would have called juvenile, and then he looked at me pointedly.

"You remember what it means," he said, a little anxiously I thought, and looked significantly at my hand. "That we will always stand by each other, through thick and thin." His eyes were pulled upward to the open door of the yacht.

"You can expect it to be both thick and thin," I said drily. "If you know my Aunt Mattie."

"She's your aunt?" he asked, his eyes widening. "Matthewa H. Tombs is *your* aunt. I never knew. To think, all those years at school, and I never knew. Why, Hap, Happy, old boy, this is wonderful. Man, have I been worried!"

"Don't stop on my account," I said, maybe a little dolefully. "Somebody reported to the Daughters of Terra that you let the natives run around out here stark naked, and if Aunt Mattie says she's going to put mother hubbards on them, then that's exactly what she's going to do. You can depend on that, old man."

"Mother Hub . . ." he gasped. He looked at me strangely. "It's a joke," he said. "Somebody's pulled a practical joke on the D.T.'s. Have you ever seen our natives? Pictures of them? Didn't anybody check up on what they're like before you came out here? It's a joke. A practical joke on the D.T.'s. It has to be."

"I wouldn't know," I said. "But if they're naked they won't be for long, I can tell you that. Aunt Mattie . . ."

His eyes left my face and darted up to the door of the ship which was no longer a black oval. The unexplained bewilderment of his expression was not diminished as Aunt Mattie came through the door, out on the loading platform, and started down the steps. He grew a little white around the mouth, licked his lips, and forgot all his joy at meeting an old school mate. His two subordinates who had remained standing just out of earshot, as if recognizing a crisis now, stepped briskly up to his sides.

Aunt Mattie's two committee women, as if to match phalanx with phalanx, came through the door and started down the steps behind her. I stepped to one side as the two forces met face to face on the crunching salt that covered the ground. It might look like a Christmas scene, but under Capella's rays it was blazing hot, and I found myself in sympathy with the men's open necked shirts and brief shorts. Still, they should have known better than to dress like that. Somebody in the State Department had goofed.

Aunt Mattie and her two committee women were dressed conservatively in something that might have resembled an English Colonel's wife's idea of the correct tweeds to wear on a cold, foggy night. If they were already sweltering beneath these coverings, as I was beginning to in my lighter suit, they were too ladylike to show it. Their acid

glance at the men's attire showed what they thought of the informality of dress in which they'd been received. But they were too ladylike to comment. After that first pointed look at bare knees, they had no need of it.

"This is the official attire prescribed for us by the State Department," Johnny said, a little anxiously, I thought. It was hardly the formal speech of welcome he, as planet administrator, must have prepared.

"I have no doubt of it," Aunt Mattie said, and her tone told them what she thought of the State Department under the present administration. "You would hardly have met ladies in such—ah—otherwise." I could see that she was making a mental note to speak to the State Department about it.

"Make a note," she said and turned to Miss Point. "I will speak to the State Department. How can one expect natives to . . . if our own representatives don't . . . etc., etc."

"May I show you to your quarters, ma'am?" Johnny asked humbly. "No doubt you will wish to freshen up, or . . ."

Miss Point blushed furiously.

"We are already quite fresh, young man," Aunt Mattie said firmly.

I happened to know that Aunt Mattie didn't like to browbeat people, not at all. It would all have been so much more pleasant, gracious, if they'd been brought up to know right from wrong. But what parents and schools had failed to do, she must correct as her duty. I thought it about time I tried to

smooth things over. I stepped up into their focus.

"Aunt Mattie," I said. "This is Johnny McCabe. We were at school together."

Her eyebrows shot upward.

"You were?" she asked, and looked piercingly at Johnny. "Then, I realize, young man, that your attire is not your fault. You must have been acting under orders, and against your personal knowledge of what would be correct. I understand." She turned again to Miss Point. "Underscore that note to the State Department," she said. "Mark it emergency." She turned back to Johnny. "Very well, Mr. McCabe, we would appreciate it, after all, if you would show us to our quarters so that we may—ah—freshen up a bit. It is rather a warm day, isn't it?"

She was quite gracious now, reassured because Johnny was an old school mate of mine, and would therefore know right from wrong. If I sometimes didn't seem to, she knew me well enough to know it had not been the fault of the school.

The three of us, Johnny on one side of Aunt Mattie and I on the other side, started toward the frame building on the other side of the bubble, which I assumed was the hotel. The four subordinates trailed along behind, silent, wary of one another.

Behind them the baggage truck, which had been piled high by the ship's crew, hissed into life and started moving along on its tractor treads. Johnny caught a glimpse of it, without actually turning around, and his eyes opened wide. He mis-

interpreted, of course. From the mountain of baggage it looked like our intention to stay a long time.

But then he wouldn't have been particularly reassured, either, had he realized that our own supplies were quite scant and these bags, boxes, and crates contained sewing machines and many, many bolts of gaily colored cloth.

I HAD HARDLY more than—ah—freshened up a bit myself in my hotel room, when I heard a discreet knock on my door. I opened it and saw Johnny McCabe.

"May I come in, Hap?" he asked. As if against his will, he glanced quickly down the hall toward the suite where aunt and her committee had been put.

"Sure, Johnny," I said, and opened the door wide. I pointed to an aluminum tube torture rack, government issue's idea of a chair. "You can have the chair," I said. "I'll sit on the edge of the bed."

"I'm sorry about the furnishings," he said apologetically as he sat down and I closed the door. "It's the best government will issue us in this hole."

"Aunt Mattie would be disappointed if it were better," I said as I sat on the edge of the bed, which was little softer than the chair. "She expects to rough it, and finds special virtue in doing her duty as uncomfortably as possible."

He looked sharply at me, but I had merely stated an accepted fact, not an opinion, and was therefore emotionless about it.

"I'm in trouble, Hap," he said

desperately. He leaned forward with his clasped hands held between his knees.

"Well, old man," I answered. "You know me."

"Yes," he said. "But there isn't anybody else I can turn to."

"Then we understand each other," I agreed. He looked both resentful and puzzled.

"No, I never did understand you," he disagreed. "I suppose it's all those billions that act as shock insulation for you. You never had to plan, and scheme, and stand alert indefinitely like a terrier at a rat hole waiting for opportunity to stick out its nose so you could pounce on it. So I don't see how you can appreciate my problem now."

"I might try," I said humbly.

"This job," he said. "It's not much, and I know it. But it was a start. The department doesn't expect anything from me but patience. It's not so much ability, you know, just a matter of who can hang on the longest without getting into trouble. I've been hanging on, and keeping out of trouble."

"But you're in trouble now."

"I will be when your aunt fails to put mother hubbards on the natives."

"She won't fail," I said confidently.

"And when she storms into the State Department with fire in her eye and starts turning things upside down, it'll be my fault—somehow," he said miserably.

"So let her put some clothes on some natives," I said. "She'll go away happy and then, for all you

care, they can take 'em off and burn 'em if they insist on going around naked. Just swing with the punch, man. Don't stand up and let 'em knock your block off. Surely you have some influence with the natives. I don't hear any war drums, any tom-toms. I don't see them trying to tear holes in the sides of your bubble to let the air out. You must be at peace with them. You must have some kind of mutual cooperation. So just get a tribe or so to go along with the idea for a while."

He looked at me and shook his head sadly. Sort of the way Aunt Mattie shook her head after a conference with my psychiatrist. But Johnny didn't seem somehow happier. He had a pretty good chest, but it didn't look enormous enough to carry any burden.

"I've been pretty proud of myself," he said. "After five years of daily attempts, and after using everything I ever learned in school courses on extraterrestrial psychology, plus some things I've made up myself, I established a kind of communication with the natives—if you could call it communication. I'd go out in my spacesuit into their chlorinated atmosphere, I'd stand in front of one of them and talk a blue streak, think a blue streak. After about five years of it, one of them slowly closed his eye and then opened it again. I invited one of them to come inside the bubble. I told him about the difference in atmosphere, that it might be dangerous. I got one of them to come in. It made no difference to him."

"Well, fine, then," I said. "Just

get some of them to come in again, let Aunt Mattie put some clothes on them, and everybody's happy."

He stood up suddenly.

"Take a walk with me, Hap," he said. It was more of a command than an invitation. "Over to the edge of the bubble. I want to show you some natives."

I was willing.

On the way around to the back of the building, over the crunching salt, I had a thought.

"If all he did was close an eye," I said. "How did you learn their language, so you could invite him inside, explain about the atmosphere?"

"I don't even know they have a language," he said. "Maybe he learned mine. I used to draw pictures in the salt, the way they taught us at school, and say words. Maybe it took him five years to put the thoughts together, maybe they don't have any concept of language at all, or need it. Maybe he was thinking about something else all those five years, and just got around to noticing me. I don't know, Hap."

We came around the edge of an outbuilding then to an unobstructed view of the bubble edge. Even through dark glasses he'd cautioned me to wear with a gesture, as he put on another pair for himself, the scene through the clear plastic was blinding white. Scattered here and there on the glistening salt were blobs of black.

"Why," I exclaimed. "Those are octopi. I suppose that's what the natives use for food? I've wondered."

"Those *are* the natives," he an-

swered, drily.

By now we were up to the plastic barrier of our bubble and stood looking out at the scene.

"Well," I said after some long moments of staring. "It will be a challenge to the D.T.'s, won't it?"

He looked at me with disgust.

"What do they eat?" I asked. "Salt?"

"I don't know if they eat," he said. "Can't you get it through your thick skull, man, that these things are alien? Completely alien? How do I know?"

"Well you must know some things after five years of study. You must have observed them. They must get food somehow, they must sleep and wake, they must procreate. You must have observed something."

"I've observed the process of procreation," he answered cautiously.

"Well fine, then," I said. "That's what's going to concern Aunt Mattie the most."

"Here's something that may help you understand them," he said, and I felt a bit of the sardonic in his voice, a grimness. "When that one visited me inside here," he said. "I took him into my office, so I could photograph him better with all the equipment. I was explaining everything, not knowing how much he understood. I happened to pick up a cigarette and a lighter. Soon as I flipped the lighter on, he shot up a tentacle and took it out of my hand. I let him keep it, of course. Next day, when I went outside, everyone of them, as far as I could see in the distance, had a

lighter, exactly like the one I'd given him. Furthermore, in a chlorinated atmosphere, without oxygen, those lighters burned normally. Does that help you to understand them better?" he asked with no attempt to hide the heavy irony.

I didn't have a chance to answer because we both heard a crunching in the salt behind us. We turned about and there was Aunt Mattie and her two committee women behind her also now in dark glasses. I waited until the ladies had come up to us, then I waved my arm grandly at the scene beyond the plastic.

"Behold the natives in all their nakedness, Aunt Mattie," I said. Then, to soften the blow it must have been, "I'm afraid somebody was pulling your leg when they reported it to the D.T.'s."

Miss Point gasped audibly.

Mrs. Waddle said, "Shocking!"

I couldn't tell whether it was the sight of the natives, or my remark which indicated I knew they had legs to pull.

For the first time in my life I saw uncertainty in Aunt Mattie's eyes as she looked, startled, at me, and then at Johnny. Then her chin squared, her back straightened still more, the shelf of her bosom firmed.

"It really won't be too much of a problem, girls," she said. "Actually simpler than some we've solved. Take a square of cloth, cut a hole in the center for that headlike pouch to come through where its eye is, put in a draw string to cinch it up tight, above those—ah—those protuberances, and let it flow out over those—ah—legs. Simple, and

quite attractive, don't you think?"

The girls nodded happily, and Johnny just stood there gasping for breath.

IT was simpler than any of us had thought.

Johnny looked at me desperately when Aunt Mattie told him to have one of the natives come in so she could fit a pattern on it, to see if any gussets would be needed for fullness—whatever gussets might be.

"One of them came inside before," I said in answer to Johnny's pleading look. "Ask him again. If he refuses, Mohammed will go to the mountain. I'm sure you have extra space suits. I'm sure the ladies won't mind going out to the natives if the natives won't come to them."

"I don't know," Johnny said miserably. "He may have had sufficient curiosity to come inside once, but not sufficient to bring him in again. You see, ladies," he turned to them desperately. "They don't seem to care about us, one way or the other."

The two committee women looked apprehensively at Aunt Mattie. Not to care about her, one way or the other? This was beyond comprehension. But Aunt Mattie was equal to it.

"Very well," she said crisply. "We shall not ask them to come to us. We shall go to them. It is our duty to carry enlightenment to the ignorant, wherever they may be, so that they can be taught to care. In the performance of our duty, we have no room for pride. We shall go

to them, humbly, happily."

We did, too.

By the time we'd got into space suits and through the bubble lock out into the ordinary landscape of Capella IV, Capella, the sun, was sinking rapidly.

"We will just have time," Aunt Mattie said crisply, through the intercom of our suits, "To set the pattern and get some idea of the sizes needed. Then tomorrow we can begin our work."

Through his face plate I got a look at Johnny's wide, apprehensive eyes.

"Ladies," he said desperately. "I must warn you again. I've never tried to touch one of them. I don't know what will happen. I can't be held responsible."

"You have been most remiss, young man," Aunt Mattie said sternly. "But then," she added, as if remembering that he had gone to a proper school, "you're young. No doubt overburdened by nonsensical red tape in your administrative duties. And—if you had done this already, there'd be no reason for my being here. I am always willing to help wherever I'm needed."

All five of us marched silently, and bravely, on after that. A hundred yards brought us to the first native. It lay there, spread eagled in eight directions, on the salt. In the center of the tentacles there arose a column of black rubbery flesh, topped by a rounded dome in the center of which was one huge liquid black eye. There was not a twitch of a tentacle as we came to a halt beside it.

"Is this the one you talked to,

Johnny?" I asked.

"How should I know?" he asked bitterly. "I never knew if I talked to the same one twice."

"They're much bigger than I thought," Miss Point said with a little dismay in her voice.

"Some of them are ten feet in diameter," Johnny said, I thought with a bit of vindictiveness in his tone.

"Never mind," Aunt Mattie said. "We'll simply sew three lengths of cloth together to get our square. I'm sure they won't mind a neatly done seam."

She had a length of cloth in one arm of her space suit, and a pair of scissors in the mechanical claw of the other hand. With her eye she seemed to measure the diameter of the dome and, manipulating the scissors with the claw like an expert space mechanic, she cut a sizable hole in the center of the cloth.

Entirely without fear or hesitation, she stepped into the triangle between two long black tentacles that lay on the salt and walked up to the erect column at the center. Expertly, she flipped the cloth so that the hole settled over the creature's head, or whatever it was. Fore and aft, the cloth rippled out to cover the tentacles. The creature did not move.

With an amazing speed, she took some bundles of cloth from the arms of Mrs. Waddle, and with even more amazing dexterity of the space claw, which showed she was no amateur, she basted a length of cloth on either side of the first strip. Then with her scissors, careful not to gouge his hide, she cut off the

corners so that the eight tentacles barely peeped out from underneath the cloth.

Somehow, it reminded me of a huge red flower with a black pistil laying there on the white salt.

"There, sir," my aunt said with satisfaction to the monster. "This will hide your nakedness, instill in you a sense of true modesty." She turned to Johnny. "They must not only know what," she instructed. "They must also know why." She turned back and faced the monster again. "It is not your fault," she said to it, "That you have been living in a state of sin. On Earth, where I come from, we have a code which must be followed. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. I'm sure that if I lived in a state of ignorant sin, I would humbly appreciate the kindness of someone letting me know. I'm sure that, in time, you will also come to appreciate it."

It was quite a noble speech, and her two companions bowed their space suit helmets in acknowledgement. Johnny's mouth and eyes were wide, and desperate. She stepped back then and we all stood there looking at the monster.

The dome of its head began to tilt until the eye was fastened upon us. It swept over the three ladies, hesitated on Johnny as if recognizing him, but came to rest upon me. It stared at me for a full minute. I stared back. In some strange way I felt as if my psychiatrist were staring at me, as he often did.

Then the great eye slowly closed, and opened again. As slowly, and somewhat to my amazement, I felt

one of my eyes close and open. I winked at it.

"That's all for this evening," Aunt Mattie said crisply. "Let it have its clothes, get used to them. I have the pattern in my mind. Tomorrow we will get out our sewing machines, and really get busy, girls."

All the way back to the entrance of the bubble, I felt that huge eye upon me, following me.

Why me?

THE GIRLS did not need to get busy the next morning.

I was awakened by a shout, there was the sound of running feet in the hall, and a pounding on my door. Sleepy eyed, for I had dreamed of the monster's eye all night long, I opened the door as soon as I had found a robe to cover my own nakedness. It was Johnny, of course.

"Most amazing thing," he rushed in and collapsed into a sitting position on the side of my bed. "Absolutely amazing. You should see them."

"What?" I asked.

The rumpus must have disturbed the ladies, too, for there came another knock on my door, and when I opened it all three of them stood there fully dressed. Apparently they had arisen at the crack of dawn to get busy with their sewing. Miss Point and Mrs. Waddle averted their eyes modestly from the V neck of my robe and my bare legs. Aunt Mattie was used to my shameless ways.

"What is it?" Aunt Mattie asked crisply.

Johnny leaped to his feet again. "Amazing," he said again. "I'll have to show you. You'll never believe it."

"Young man," Aunt Mattie said sharply. "No one has accused you of untruthfulness, and you are hardly a judge of what we are capable of believing."

He stood looking at her with his mouth open.

"Now ladies," I said, and started closing the door. "If you'll excuse me for two minutes I'll dress and we'll go see what Mr. McCabe wants to show us."

The door clicked on my last words, and I hastily doffed the robe and slid into pants and a shirt. Oddly enough, I knew what he was going to show us. I just knew. I slipped on some shoes without bothering about socks.

"All right," I said. "I'm ready."

They had started down the hall, and we quickly overtook them. Johnny went ahead, led us out of the hotel, around its side, and when we came around the corner of the outbuilding which obscured the view, there before us, through the bubble wall, we saw what I had expected.

As far as the eye could see, dotted here and there like poppies on snow, the natives lay in the early sun, each dressed in flaring cloth like that Aunt Mattie had designed the night before.

"You see?" Johnny cried out. "It's the same as with the lighter. One liked it, so they all have it!"

By now we were up against the plastic barrier. The two subordinates were gassing such words as

"Fantastic, amazing, astounding, incredible, wondrous, weird".

Aunt Mattie took it all in, and her face lit into a beatific smile.

"You see, young man," she said to Johnny. "They needed only to be shown right from wrong. Let this be a lesson to you."

"But how did they do it?" Mrs. Waddle gasped.

"Give them some credit for diligence and ingenuity," Aunt Mattie almost snapped at her assistant. "I always say we underrate the intelligence and ingenuity of the lesser orders, and that it saps their strengths if we are overprotective. I admire self-reliance, and these have shown they have it. So we will not have to do the sewing after all. Come girls, we must pack and be on our way back to Earth. Our mission here is accomplished."

The two ladies obeyed their leader without question. The three of them, in their sturdy walking shoes and their tweed suits, crunched off across the salt back to their rooms to start packing.

Johnny and I walked along more slowly behind.

"The incredible Matthewa H. Tombs!" he breathed. "She's a legend, you know, Hap. But I never believed it before." Then, in a complete and sudden change of mood he snickered. Or, at least, it was the nearest thing to a small boy snicker I'd heard since prep school. The snicker turned into a roar of laughter, a grown man's laughter. "If they only knew!" he shouted, apparently feeling secure because they'd turned the corner and gone out of sight.

"Knew what?" I asked.

"Why," he said, and doubled up with laughter again. "They've covered up all the innocent parts and left the reprehensible part, which is right behind the eye, fully exposed."

"Johnny, my boy," I said with a chuckle. "Do you really believe there are innocent parts and reprehensible parts of any creature in the universe?"

He stood stock still and stared at me.

"It takes a nasty, salacious mind to make that kind of separation," I said.

"But your aun . . . the Daughters of . . ."

"I know my aunt and the Daughters of Terra," I said. "I've lived with them for years. I know their kind of mind. Who would know it better?"

"But you . . ."

"The human race," I said, "is very young. It's only in the last few thousand years that it has discovered sex as a concept. So like little kids in kindergarten it goes around being embarrassed and snickering. But we'll grow up. Give us time."

"But you . . ." he said again. "But they . . . That's the kind of organization that keeps us from growing up, Hap. Don't you see that? They've kept us mentally retarded for generations, centuries. How can we make progress when . . ."

"What's the hurry, Johnny? We've got millions of years, billions, eternity."

He looked at me again, sharply, shrewdly.

"I've underestimated you, Hap," he said. "I'm afraid I always did. I had no idea you . . ."

I shrugged and passed it off. I'd had no idea either, not until this morning, last night, yesterday evening when that eye had turned on me—and I'd winked back.

I didn't know how to tell him, or any reason why I should, that there couldn't be anything right or wrong, good or bad; that nothing could happen, nothing at all, excepting through the working of the law of nature. Could one say that water running down hill is good, and water being pumped up hill is bad? Both are operating within known physical laws. With millions of years to go, wasn't it likely we would go on discovering the laws governing how things worked? Until one by one we had to give up all notion of good and bad happenings? Understood them as only the operation of natural law? In all the universe, how could there be any such thing as unnatural happenings?

"Don't worry about it, Johnny," I said as we started walking again. "And don't worry about your career, either. Aunt Mattie likes you, and she's mighty pleased with the results of her work out here. Certain people in the State Department may consider her a bit of a meddlesome pest, but make no mistake about it, every politician in the universe trembles in his boots at the very mention of the D.T.'s. And she likes you, Johnny."

"Thanks, Hap," he said as we came to a stop before the doorway of the hotel. "I'll see you before your ship takes off. Oh—ah—you

won't tell her she covered up the wrong—well what she would think was the wrong part?"

"I could have told her that last night," I said.

He walked away with that startled, incredulous look he'd worn ever since our arrival.

ON EARTH Aunt Mattie had to rush off to a convention of D.T.'s, where I had no doubt her latest exploit in combating ignorance and sin would be the main topic of conversation and add to the triumph of her lionization. To give her credit, I think this lionization bothered her, embarrassed her a little, and she probably wondered at times if it were all sincere. But I also think she would have been lonely and disappointed without it. When one is doing all he can to make the universe we have inherited a better place for our posterity to inherit one likes it to be appreciated.

For two or three weeks after she came back home, she was immersed in administrative duties for the D.T., setting wheels in motion to carry out all the promises she'd made at the convention.

I spent the time in my own suite in the south wing of our house. Mostly, I just sat. No one bothered me except the servants necessary to eating, dressing, sleeping, and they were all but mute about it. My psychiatrist called once, but I sent word that I didn't need any today. I called none of my regular friends and did not answer their messages.

I did send to the Library of

Science in Washington for the original science survey report on Capella IV. It told me little, but allowed me to surmise some things. Apparently the original scientists were singularly uncurious about the octopoids, perhaps because they didn't have five years to hang around and wait for one to blink an eye, as Johnny had. As always, they were overworked and understaffed, they did their quick survey and rushed on to some new planet job. If one hoped that someday somebody might go back and take another look at the octopoids I found no burning yearning for it in the dry reports.

As far as they went, their surmise was accurate. Some millions, many millions of years ago, the planet had lost the last of its ocean water. Apparently, as they failed to adapt to the increasing salinity of the little left, one by one the original life forms died out. Something in the octopoid metabolism (or mentality?) allowed them to survive, to become land instead of water animals. Something in their metabolism (or mentality?) allowed them to subsist on the air and sunlight. (Really now? Did they even need these?) That was as far as the reports went.

They did not draw the picture of highly developed mentalities who lay there for millions of years and thought about the nature of being. Such things as how mental manipulation of force fields can provide each of them with a cigarette lighter that burns without any fluid in it and any oxygen around its wick, or such things as mother hub-

bards which had caught their fancy, or perhaps gave them some kind of sensual kick caused by heat filtering through red cloth.

But mostly I just sat.

I went to see Aunt Mattie when she came back from the convention, of course. She had the west wing where her sitting room looked out upon her flora collection—and the gardeners who were supposed to keep busy. Our greeting was fond, but brief. She did look at me rather quizzically, rather shrewdly, but she made no comment. She did not return my visit.

This was not unusual. She never visited my suite. When I was twenty-one she took me into the south wing and said, "Choose your own suite, Hapland. You are a man now, and I understand about young men." If she had in mind what I thought she had it was a mighty big concession to reality, although, of course, she was five years late in coming around to it.

This older generation—so wise, so naive. She probably resolutely refrained from imagining far worse things than really went on.

About two weeks after she'd come back from the convention, a month since we returned from Capella IV, there was an interruption, an excited one. For once in his life the butler forgot to touch my door with feather fingertips and cough discreetly. Instead he knocked two sharp raps, and opened the door without invitation.

"Come quickly, Master Hapland," he chattered urgently. "There are creatures on our private landing field."

There were, too.

When I got there in my garden scooter, and pushed my way through the crowd of gardeners who were clustered on the path and around the gate to the landing field, I saw them. At least a dozen of the Capella IV octopoids were spread eagled, their tentacles out flat on the hot cement of the runway. Their eye stared unblinking into the sun. Over their spread of tentacles, like inverted hibiscus blossoms, they wore their mother hubbards.

Behind them, over at the far edge of the field, was an exact duplicate of our own space yacht. I wondered, rather hysterically perhaps, if each of them on Capella IV now had one. I suspected the yacht was simply there for show, that they hadn't needed it, not any more than they needed the mother hubbards.

There was the hiss of another scooter, and I turned around to see Aunt Mattie come to a stop. She stepped out and came over to me.

"Our social call on Capella IV is being returned," I said with a grin and twinkle at her.

She took in the sight with only one blink.

"Very well," she answered. "I shall receive them, of course." Somebody once said that the most snobbish thing about the whole tribe of Tombs was that they'd never learned the meaning of the word, or had to. But I did wonder what the servants would think when the creatures started slithering into our drawing room.

There was a gasp and a low rumble of protesting voices from

the gardeners as Aunt Mattie opened the gate and walked through it. I followed, of course. We walked up to the nearest monster and came to stop at the edge of its skirt.

"I'm deeply honored," Aunt Mattie said with more cordiality than I'd seen her use on a Secretary of State. "What can I do to make your visit to Earth more comfortable?"

There was no reply, not even the flicker of a tentacle.

They were even more unusual than one might expect. Aunt Mattie resolutely went to each of the dozen and gave the same greeting. She felt her duty as a hostess required it, although I knew that a greeting to one was a greeting to all. Not one of them responded. It seemed rather ridiculous. They'd come all this way to see us, then didn't bother to acknowledge that we were there.

We spent more than an hour waiting for some kind of a response. None came. Aunt Mattie showed no sign of impatience, which I thought was rather praiseworthy, all things considered. But finally we left. She didn't show what she felt, perhaps felt only that one had to be patient with the lack of manners in the lower orders.

I was more interested in another kind of feeling, the one we left behind. What was it? I couldn't put my finger on it. Sadness? Regret? Distaste? Pity? Magnanimity? Give a basket of goodies to the poor at Christmas? Give them some clothes to cover their nakedness? Teach them a sense of shame?

No, I couldn't put my finger on it.

Hilarity?

I found myself regretting that back there on Capella IV, when Aunt Mattie put clothes on him, and the monster had looked at me, I winked.

I wondered why I should regret that.

I didn't have long to wonder.

Nothing happened during the rest of the day. We went back, together and separately, several times during the daylight hours and during the early hours of the night. For a wonder, nobody had leaked anything to the newspapers, and for what it was worth, we had the show to ourselves.

"Perhaps tomorrow," Aunt Mattie said around midnight, as we left the field for the last time. "Perhaps they must rest."

"I could use some of that," I said with a yawn.

"Yes, Hapland," she agreed. "We must conserve our strength. Heaven knows what may be required of us on the morrow."

Did she feel something, too? It was so strong, how could she help it? And yet, the monster had not looked into her eye.

I didn't expect to sleep well, but I fooled myself. I was quite sure I hadn't more than closed my eyes when I was roused by another excited rapping on my bedroom door and again the butler rushed in without ceremony.

"Look, Master Hapland," he shouted in a near falsetto.

He pulled so hard on my drapes

they swept back from my windows like a stage curtain—and I looked.

To the very limit of our grounds in the distance, but not beyond, the trees, the shrubs, the drives and walkways, the lawns and ponds, all were covered with a two foot thick blanket of glistening salt.

"And the monsters are gone," the butler was saying. "And I must go to your aunt."

"So must I," I said, and grabbed up a robe.

As I ran, overtook him, passed him, from all over the house I could hear excited outcries, wonder, amazement, anger, fear from the servants. I finished the length of my wing, sprinted through the main body of the house, and down the hallway of her wing to the door of her suite. I didn't need to knock, someone had left it open.

Her own personal maid, I saw, as I ran past the little alcove into the sitting room. The maid was standing beside Aunt Mattie, wringing her hands and crying. The drapes here, too, were swept full back, and, through the windows I could see the collection, the highly prized, wondrous collection of flora, all covered in salt.

Aunt Mattie stood there, without support, looking at it. When I came up to her there were tears in her eyes and glistening streaks on her wrinkled cheeks.

"Why?" she asked. It was very quietly spoken.

By now the butler had made the trip, and came into the room. I turned to him.

"If we hurry," I said. "A good deal of the collection is enclosed

under plastic domes. If we don't wet the salt, and if we hurry and have it scraped away from the buildings it won't poison the ground inside them. We can save most of the collection that way."

"No, Master Hapland," he said, and shook his head. "The salt is inside the buildings, just as much as here. A gardener shouted it at me as I passed."

Aunt Mattie's closed fist came up to her lips, and then dropped again. That was all.

"Why, Hapland?" she asked again. "Evil for good? Why?"

I motioned the maid and butler to leave—and take with them the cluster of servants around the door in the hall. I took Aunt Mattie over to her favorite chair, the one where she could sit and look out at her collection; no point in pretending the salt wasn't there. I sat down at her feet, the way I used to when I was ten years old. I looked out at the salt, too. It was everywhere. Every inch of our grounds was covered with it, to poison the earth so that nothing could grow in it. It would take years to restore the grounds, and many more years to restore the collection.

"Try to understand, Aunt Mattie," I said. "Not only what I say, but all the implications of it. They didn't return evil for good. Let's see it from what might have been their point of view. They live on a world of salt, an antiseptic world. We went there, and you intended good. You told them that our code was to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

(Continued on page 112)

*They came home from a strange journey . . . And heroes they
might have been—a little dog and a man!*



Illustrated by Ed Emsh

BY ANDERSEN HORNE

The DAY OF THE DOG

CAROL stared glumly at the ship-to-shore transmitter. "I hate being out here in the middle of the Caribbean with no radio communication. Can't you fix it?"

"This is a year for sun spots, and transmission usually gets impossible around dusk," Bill explained. "It will be all right in the morning. If you want to listen to the radio, you can use the portable radio directional finder. That always works."

"I want to catch the 5 o'clock news and hear the latest on our satellite," Carol replied. She went to

the RDF and switched it on to the standard broadcast channel. "Anyhow, I'd feel better if we could put out a signal. The way we're limping along with water in our gas is no fun. It will take us twenty hours to get back to Nassau the way we're losing RPM'S."

Bill Anderson looked at his young, pretty wife and smiled. "You're behaving like a tenderfoot. We've plenty of gas, a good boat and perfect weather. Tomorrow morning I'll clean out our carburetors and we'll pick up speed. Meantime, we're about to enter one of the prettiest harbors in the Bahamas, throw over anchor . . ."

The RDF drowned him out.

"The world is anxiously awaiting return of the chamber from the world's first manned satellite launched by the United States ten days ago. The world also awaits the answers to two questions: Is there any chance that Robert Joy, the volunteer scientist who went up in the satellite, is still living? There seems to be little hope for his survival since radio communication from him stopped three days ago. Timing mechanism for the ejection of Joy are set for tonight. And that's the second question. Will the satellite, still in its orbit, eject the chamber containing Joy? Will it eject the chamber as scheduled, and will the chamber arrive back at earth at the designated place?"

"There are many 'ifs' to this project which is shrouded in secrecy. The President himself has assured us of a free flow of news once the chamber has been recovered, and this station will be standing by to

bring you a full report."

Carol switched the radio off. "Do you think he's alive?" She suppressed a shudder. "God! Think of a human being up there in that thing."

"Well, the dog lived for several days. It was just a question of getting it back, which the Russians couldn't do. I don't know about Joy. He sounded real cheerful and healthy until his broadcasts stopped." Bill peered into the fading twilight. "Come on now, let's put our minds to getting the hook over!"

They concentrated on the tricky entrance to the lee side of Little Harbor Cay. It meant finding and passing a treacherous coral head north of the adjoining Frozen Cay. Little Harbor Cay was midway in the chain of the Berry Islands which stretched to the north like beads in a necklace.

"There's the cove," called Carol. About a mile of coastline ahead was the small native settlement. Once the center of a thriving sponge industry, the island was now practically deserted. A handful of small cottages, a pile of conch shells on the beach and two fishing smacks gave evidence of a remaining, though sparse, population.

Dusk was rapidly approaching and Carol strained her eyes against the failing light. Bill heard her call his name and saw her pointing—not ahead to their anchorage, but amidships and toward the sky. He turned his eyes to where she was indicating and saw a dullish object in the sky, some thousand feet up. The object seemed to be falling

leisurely towards earth.

"What in the world is that?" asked Bill. "It's not a bird, that's for sure."

The object seemed to be parachuting, not falling. The breezes were blowing it towards the island. Before they could study it further, it was lost in the lowering dusk and darkness of the shore line.

"Looks like a ball on a parachute," Bill finally said. However, the business at hand was to make secure the *Seven Seas* and together they spent the next quarter hour anchoring.

After "setting the hook" securely, Carol and Bill donned swim suits, dove overboard and swam lazily the 300 yards in to shore.

"Let's try to find that thing we saw. It shouldn't be too far from here," said Carol the moment they hit the beach.

They climbed inland on the rocky island. Little green lizards scooted underfoot and vines scratched at their ankles.

Bill was leading, when suddenly he called, "Carol, I see something up ahead! There's something lying on the ground!" He hurried toward what he had seen.

The dying sun reflected on a luminescent bolt of cloth, somewhat like a spun-aluminum fabric. Thin wire lines were entangling it, and about ten feet away lay three fragments of what appeared to have been a dull metal box.

Carol knelt at the closest piece, evidently a corner of the box. It was lined with wiring and tubes.

"It looks like electronic equipment," decided Carol, peering in-

tently at the strange piece. Bill had approached the second and largest fragment.

He carefully turned it over. It was filled with black and yellow . . . fur?

"Oh no!" he cried, knowing in a flash, yet denying it in his mind at the same time. Stunned he stared at the perky ears, the dull staring and unseeing eyes, the leather thongs that held the head and body of a dog to the metal encasement. Carol saw it the next instant.

"It's some horrible joke!" she gasped. "It couldn't be the second Russian satellite, it couldn't be Mutt-nik! My God, no, it couldn't be!"

Bill kept staring, his thoughts racing. There were rumors of an ejection chamber for Mutt-nik. But they had been denied by the Russians. But suppose the Russians *had* planned an ejection chamber for the dog Laika when they launched the satellite and had only denied it after they thought it had failed?

But if it *had* worked, why had it taken so long to find its way to earth? The satellite itself was supposed to have disintegrated months ago.

"Damn," thought Bill. "I wish I were a scientist right now instead of a know-nothing artist!"

He touched the dog with his toe. It was perfectly preserved, as though it had died, just a few hours before. It was rigid, but it had not started to decompose.

"Carol, are we crazy? Is this some dream, or do you believe we are looking at the ejection chamber of the Russian satellite?" he asked,

doubting even what he was saying.

"I don't know." Carol was wide-eyed. "But what shall we do now? We'd better contact the authorities immediately!"

Bill tried to keep reason from overcoming his disbelief of their discovery.

"But how, Carol? Our radio transmitter isn't working. It won't till morning. And there's certainly no other way to communicate with anyone. We can't even take the boat anywhere with the speed we're making. We'll have to wait till morning."

"What shall we do with the dog?" asked Carol. "Do you think we ought to bury it?"

"Lord no, Carol. The body of the dog will be extremely valuable to science. We've got to get someone here as quickly as possible." Bill was trying to steady his nerves.

"Let's go back and try to raise someone on the radio. Let's try again, it may work," called Carol, running in the direction of the boat. Bill followed her. They stumbled on the craggy rocks and exposed sea grape roots, but together in the darkness they struck out for the boat.

Bill was first aboard and went directly to the ship-to-shore radio.

"Try the Nassau marine operator first," Carol panted as she clambered aboard. "He's a lot closer to us than Miami."

As the receiver warmed up, static filled the cabin. Bill depressed the transmitting button. "This is the Yacht *Seven Seas* calling the Nassau Marine operator," he called into the phone. Only static answered.

THE DAY OF THE DOG

"Bill!" Carol said in sudden inspiration. "Give a May Day. Try every channel with a May Day. If anyone picks up a May Day call you'll get emergency action."

"May Day, May Day! This is the Yacht *Seven Seas*. Come in anyone!" Bill called urgently into the mouthpiece. He switched to the Coast Guard channel, then to the Miami Marine operators channel. Only static filled the cabin. No welcome voice acknowledged their distress call. Bill flipped the switch desperately to the two ship-to-ship channels. "May Day! Come in any boat!" Still static. Nothing but static.

IT WAS night. A night without a moon. The island loomed dark against the black waters. The dark was relieved only by a small fire burning at the native settlement a half-mile down the coast, and the cabin lights of the *Seven Seas*.

"What will we do now?" Carol tried to sound unconcerned, but her voice sounded thin and wavering.

"I don't know what we can do, except wait until daybreak. I'm sure we can get a signal out then," Bill replied, clamly as he could. He hoped she couldn't hear the pounding of his heart.

"What about the dog?" she asked. "Will it be all right there? Should we bring it aboard?"

"We better leave everything untouched. Our best bet is to get some sleep and place our call as soon as day breaks."

Neither of them could eat much supper and after putting the dishes

away, they made up their bunks and climbed in. After a very few minutes, Bill handed a lighted cigarette across the narrow chasm between the bunks.

"I can't sleep. My head is spinning. Do you really believe that's what we've found?" Carol's voice sounded small.

"Yes, I do. I believe we've found the Russian ejection unit, complete with the dog Laika and instrumentation."

They lay quietly, the glow of two cigarettes occasionally reflecting on the bulkhead. Bill finally arose.

"I can't think of another thing but what's sitting out there on Little Harbor Cay!" He walked up to the main cabin and switched on the RDF. For a few minutes there was music, and then:

"Flash! The United States Government has just officially released the news that at 10:09 p.m. Eastern Standard Time the U. S. Satellite ejection chamber was successfully returned to earth at the designated location. This was some six hours earlier than expected. The chamber, into which Robert Joy voluntarily had himself strapped, has landed at an undisclosed site and is being raced under heavy guard to the Walter Reed Hospital at Washington, D. C. There is no hope that Joy is still living. Word has just been released by Dr. James R. Killian that instruments measuring Joy's pulse rate indicated three days ago that all Joy's bodily processes ceased to function at that time. We repeat, all hope of the survival of Robert Joy is now abandoned as the result of scientific data

just released by Dr. Killian.

"The satellite is being brought intact to Walter Reed Hospital and leading physiologists and scientists are racing to the scene to be on hand for the opening of the unit scheduled for 6 a.m. tomorrow morning. Further reports will be given as received. This station will remain on the air all night. Stay tuned for further developments. We repeat, the U. S. satellite's ejection chamber, containing the first human being ever to go into space, has been successfully returned to earth as predicted, though all hope has been abandoned for the survival of Robert Joy, the man in the moon. The chamber will be opened for scientific study tomorrow morning. Stay tuned for further news."

Bill tuned down the music that ensued and returned to his bunk. "You heard that Carol?" He knew she wasn't asleep.

"Yes. And it makes this whole thing that we've found seem more plausible. I've been lying here trying to make myself believe it's some sort of dream, but it isn't. If we could only . . ." Carol's voice faded softly into the night.

There was absolutely nothing they could do. Nothing but lie there and smoke and pretend to sleep. They didn't talk much, and keenly felt the terrible frustration of their enforced silence on the ship-to-shore. They heard several more news reports and several analyses of the news, but nothing new was added throughout the night. The radio only reiterated that the ejection unit had been recovered, that

hope had faded for Joy's survival and that the chamber was to be opened in the morning as soon as scientists had convened in Washington.

DAWN, long in coming, broke about 4:30. With the lifting of the dark, the sun spots which interferred with radio reception miraculously lifted also. Bill and Carol sat next to the ship-to-shore and turned it on. This time they heard the reassuring hum of the transmitter, not drowned out by the awful static of the night before. Bill switched to the Coast Guard channel.

"May Day. May Day. This is the *Seven Seas* calling the United States Coast Guard. Come in please!"

And a voice, almost miraculously, answered, "This is the U. S. Coast Guard. Come in *Seven Seas*. What is your position? Come in *Seven Seas*."

"This is the yacht *Seven Seas* back to the Coast Guard. We are located at the Berry Islands at Little Harbor Cay. We want to report the discovery of what we believe to be the second Russian satellite."

"This is the Coast Guard to the *Seven Seas*. Do we read you correctly? Are you reporting discovery of the Russian satellite? Please clarify. Over." A stern voice crackled through the speaker.

"Last evening on entering the harbor here we saw an object fall to the ground. On inspection, it was a metal box which was broken apart on impact. In it are electronic equipment and the body of a small dog. Over." Bill tried to be calm

and succinct.

"Coast Guard to *Seven Seas*. Is your boat in distress? Over."

"No, no! Did you read me about the Russian satellite?" asked Bill, impatience in his voice.

"Will you state your name and address. Will you state the master's full name, and the call letters and registration of your craft. Over," crackled the voice from the speaker.

"Oh my lord, we're not going to have red tape at a time like this, are we?" Carol asked exasperatedly.

"This is Bill Anderson of Ft. Lauderdale, owner and skipper. Our call letters are William George 3176, Coast Guard registration #235-46-5483. What are your instructions regarding dog satellite?"

"Please stand by."

Bill and Carol stared at each other while the voice on the radio was silent.

"This is the United States Coast Guard calling the yacht *Seven Seas*."

"*Seven Seas* standing by."

"We wish to remind you that it is illegal and punishable by fine and or imprisonment to issue false reports to the Coast Guard. We are investigating your report and wish you to stand by."

"Investigating our report?" Bill fairly shouted into the phone. "Good God, man! The thing to investigate is *here*, laying in three pieces on the middle of Little Harbor Cay. This is no joke." Despite the emotion in Bill's voice, the answer came back routine and cold, "Please stand by. We will call you. Do not, we repeat, do not make further contact anywhere. Please

stand by. Coast Guard standing by with the *Seven Seas*."

"*Seven Seas* standing by," shouted Bill, almost apoplectic, his face reddening in anger.

"Now what? It looks like they're going to take their time in believing us. At least until they find out who we are and if we're really here," said Carol.

Bill paced the deck in frustration. Suddenly he decided, "Carol, you stick with the radio. I'm going ashore again and take another look at our Muttink. It seems so incredible that I'm not even sure of what I saw last night. Once they believe us they'll want to know as much about it as we can tell them." Bill hurriedly put on his swim suit and heard Carol shout as he dove overboard, "Hurry back, Bill. I don't like you leaving me here alone!"

Bill swam with sure even strokes to the shore where they had gone last night. The water felt cool. It soothed his nerves which jangled in the excitement of the discovery and in the anger at the disbelieving authorities. He reached shallow water and waded towards shore.

Suddenly he stopped dead, his ankles in five inches of water. His eyes stared ahead in disbelief. His brain was numbed. Only his eyes were alive, staring, wide in horror. Finally his brain pieced together the image that his vision sent to it. Pieced it together but made no comprehension of it.

His brain told him that there was a blanket of fur laying unevenly twenty feet back from the shore line. A blanket of yellow and black fur . . . covering the earth, covering

mangrove roots, fitted neatly around the bent palm tree trunks, lying over the rocks that had cut his feet last night . . . smothering, suffocating . . . hugging the earth.

Bill shut his eyes, and still the vision kept shooting to his brain. All yellow and black and fuzzy, with trees or a tall mangrove bush or a sea grape vine sticking up here and there.

He opened his eyes and wanted to run, for the scene was still there. It hadn't disappeared as a nightmare disappears when you wake up. Thick yellow and black fur lay on the ground like dirty snow. Covering everything low, hugging the base of taller things.

"Run!" his mind told him. Yet he stood rooted to the spot, staring at the carpet of fur near him. It was only ten feet away. Ten feet? His every muscle jumped. The lock that had held his muscles and brain in a tight vice gave loose and a flood of realization hit him. "It's moving!" he realized in horror. "It's growing!"

AS HE WATCHED, slowly, slowly, as the petals of a morning glory unfold before the eye, the yellow and black fur carpet stretched itself in ever-increasing perimeter.

He saw it approach a rock near the beach. The mind, when confronted with a huge shock, somehow concentrates itself on a small detail. Perhaps it tries to absorb itself in a small thing because the whole thing is too great to comprehend all at once. So with Bill's mind. He saw the yellow and black

fur grow toward the rock. It seemed to ooze around it and then up and over the top of it. Bill saw, when it reached the top of the rock, that it dropped a spiny tendril to the ground. Like a root, the tendril buried itself into the earth below the jutting rock, and slowly the rock was covered with the flowing fur.

Bill's thoughts sped ahead of his reason. The dog. The dog . . . growing like a plant. Its hide covering the ground, putting out roots, suffocating everything, smothering everything, growing, growing.

With almost superhuman effort, he turned his back on the awful sight and swam desperately out to the *Seven Seas*.

"Bill, what's happened?" cried Carol, when she saw his white and terrified face.

"Carol . . . the dog . . . it must have had some cosmic reaction to its cellular structure . . . some cancerous reaction . . . when the chamber broke open and the cells were exposed to our atmosphere again it started some action . . . started to grow . . . doesn't stop growing . . . it's horrible . . ." Bill's words were disjointed and hysterical.

Carol stared at him. "Bill, *what* are you saying?" Bill pointed mutely to the shore. Carol rushed to the cockpit. She stared at the island. She ran back to the cabin where Bill was sitting, holding his head in his hands. She grabbed the binoculars from the bookshelf and turned them to the island.

"Bill! It's . . . oh no! The whole island looks as though it's covered with . . . fur!" She screamed.

Bill grabbed the binoculars and

ranged the island with them. A quarter of a mile down he could see small figures in the water, floundering around, climbing aboard the two fishing smacks. All around, the black and yellow mounds of fur carpeted the pretty green island with a soft rug of yellow and black.

"Get the Coast Guard, Carol!"

"They called back while you were gone. They're sending a plane over immediately."

"Call them, Carol!" Bill shouted at her. "Don't you realize what this could mean? Don't you realize that something, only God knows what, has happened to the cellular structure of this animal, has turned it into a voracious plant-like thing that seems to grow and grow once it hits our atmosphere? Don't you realize that today they're going to open that satellite, that other one, in Washington? Suppose this is what happens when living tissue is exposed to cosmic rays or whatever is up there. Don't you see what could happen?" Bill was hoarse from fright and shouting. "Smother everything, grow and grow and smother . . ."

Carol was at the ship-to-shore.

"What time is it, Carol?"

"I don't know. 5:30 I guess."

"They plan to open the ejection chamber at six. We've got to tell them what happened here before they open it! Hurry with the damned Coast Guard!"

"May Day! May Day! Coast Guard come in. This is the *Seven Seas*. Come in and hurry!"

"Coast Guard to the *Seven Seas*. Come in."

Bill grabbed the phone. "Listen carefully," he said in a quiet determined voice. "This is God's own truth. I repeat: This is God's own truth. The remains of the dog we discovered last night have started to grow. It is growing as we look at it. It has covered the entire island as far as we can see, with fur. Stinking yellow and black fur. We've got to get word to Washington before they open up the satellite. The same thing could happen there. Do you understand? I must get in touch with Washington. Immediately!"

There was no mistaking the urgency and near-panic in Bill's voice. The Coast Guard returned with "We understand you *Seven Seas*. We will clear a line directly to Dr. Killian in Washington. Stand by."

With his hand shaking, Bill turned on the standard broadcast band of the portable RDF. A voice cut in: "... latest reports from Walter Reed General Hospital where the first human-manned satellite ejection chamber has just been opened. All leading physiolo-

gists and physicists were assembled at the hospital by midnight last night and plans to open the ejection chamber at 6 a.m. this morning were moved up. The chamber was opened at 4 a.m. Eastern Standard Time today. Our first report confirmed that volunteer moon traveler, the man in the moon, Robert Joy, was no longer alive. Hope had been abandoned for him some 80 hours previous, when recording instruments on his body processes indicated no reactions. Of scientific curiosity is the fact that though dead for more than three days, his body is in a perfect state of preservation . . .

"Flash! We interrupt this special newscast for a late bulletin: The body of Robert Joy has begun to shoot out unexplained appendages, like rapidly growing cancerous growths. His integument appears to be enlarging, growing away from his body . . ."

"Hello *Seven Seas*," broke in the ship-to-shore. "We are still trying to locate Dr. Killian . . ." **END**

IN THE AUGUST ISSUE!

An exciting new novelette about a group of political refugees and one man who stopped running . . .

THE WAGES OF DEATH

By Robert Silverberg

ALSO—one of the funniest sports stories you ever read—*Who's On First*, by Lloyd Biggle, Jr., in which a super, "out-of-this-world" team amazes and startles the world of baseball. And other unusual science fiction entertainment.

*What is more frightening
than the fear of the un-
known? Johnny found out!*

SOUND OF TERROR

BY DON BERRY

THE DAY was still no more than a ragged streak of red in the east; the pre-dawn air was sharply cold, making Johnny Youngbear's face feel slightly brittle as he dressed quietly in the gray bedroom.

He sat down on the bed, pulling on his boots, and felt his wife stir



Illustrated by Ed Emsh

sleepily beneath the covers. Suddenly she stiffened, sat upright in the bed, startled into wakefulness. Johnny put one dark, bony hand on her white shoulder, gently, reassuring. After a moment, finding herself, she turned away and lit a cigarette. Johnny finished pulling on his boots and stood, his hawk-like face unreadable in the cold gray light streaming through the huge picture window.

"Johnny?" said his wife hesitantly.

He murmured an acknowledgement, watching the bright flare of color as she drew on the cigarette. Her soft, dark hair was coiled loosely around her shoulders, very black against the pale skin. Her eyes were invisible in shadow, and Johnny could not read their expression. He turned away, knowing she was watching him.

"Be careful," she said simply.

"Try," he said. Then he shrugged. "Not my day, anyway."

"I know," she said. "But—be careful."

He left the house and walked out into the chill desert dawn. He turned his face to the brightness in the east, trying to catch a little warmth, but could not.

He warmed up the jeep, listening to the engine grumble protest until it settled to a flat, banging roar. He swerved out of the driveway with a screaming of tires. Reaching the long ribbon of concrete that led out into the desert, he settled down hard on the accelerator, indifferent to the whining complaint of the jeep's motor.

It was eight miles from his

sprawling house to the Mesa Dry Lake launching site, due east, into the sun. He pulled to the top of Six Mile Hill and stopped in the middle of the highway. Two miles ahead was Launching Base I, throwing long, sharp shadows at him in the rosy dawn light. A cluster of squat, gray blockhouses; a long runway tapering into the distance with an Air Force B-52 motionless at the near end; that was all.

Except the Ship.

The Ship towered high, dominating the desert like a pinnacle of bright silver. Even silhouetted against the eastern sky, it sparkled and glistened. Impassive it stood, graceful, seeming to strain into the sky, anxious to be off and gone. The loading gantry was a dark, spidery framework beside The Ship, leaning against it, drawing strength from its sleek beauty.

Johnny watched it in silence for a moment, then turned his eyes up, to the sky. Somewhere up there a tiny satellite spun wildly about the earth, a little silver ball in some celestial roulette wheel. Gradually it would spiral closer and closer, caught by the planet's implacable grasp, until it flared brightly like a cigarette in the heavens before dissolving into drops of molten metal.

But it would have served its purpose. In its short life it would have given Man knowledge; knowledge of space, knowledge enough that he could go himself, knowing what he would find in the emptiness between the earth and the moon. Or knowing nearly.

What's it like out there?

The satellite answered partly;

the Ship would answer more.

Johnny slammed the jeep into gear, hurtled down the other side of Six Mile Hill. Through his mind ran the insistent repetition of an old song he knew, and he hummed it tunelessly through closed teeth.

*I had a true wife but I left her
... oh, oh, oh.*

The jeep skidded to a halt beside Control. Mitch Campbell's green station wagon was already there, creaking and settling as the motor cooled.

Control was full of people; Air Force brass, technicians, observers, enlisted men of indiscernible purpose. The room hummed with the muted buzz of low, serious conversation.

Mitch Campbell sat in one corner, apparently forgotten in the confusion. He had nothing to do. Not yet. He was already in flight dress, holding the massive helmet in his hands morosely, turning it over and over, staring at it as though he thought he might find his head inside if he looked carefully enough.

"Morning, Colonel," said Johnny, forcing his voice to be casual and cheerful. "You're up early this morning."

"Morning, Colonel yourself," said Mitch, looking up.

"Big date today?"

"Well—yeah, you might say so," Mitch said, smiling faintly and with obvious effort. "Thought I might go once around lightly," he said, hooking his thumb upwards. Upwards through the concrete ceiling, into the air, through the air, up where there was no air for a man to breathe. Once around lightly.

Around the world. Lightly.

"Tell you what, Mitch."

"O.K., tell me what," he said.

"You like the movies?" Johnny asked. "You like to get a little adventure in your soul? You like a little vicarious thrill now and then?"

"Yeah, I like that."

"Tell you what. We'll go. No, don't thank me. We'll go. Tonight. Eight o'clock, you come by."

"Wives and everybody?" Mitch asked.

"Why not?" Johnny said. "They're cooped up in the house all day."

They both knew the wives would be in Control in an hour, listening to the radio chatter, waiting, eyes wide, shoulders stiff and tight.

"Fine," said Mitch. "Fine."

A crew chief came up and touched Johnny's shoulder. "Colonel Youngbear," he said, "Observation is going up."

Johnny stood and looked out the tiny window at the red-painted B-52.

"See you tonight, Mitch. Eight o'clock? Don't forget. Westerns."

"See you," said Mitch. He looked back down at the helmet and was turning it over and over again when Johnny left.

The Observation B-52 climbed, screaming.

Johnny lit a cigarette and watched out the port at the contrails rolling straight and white behind the jets.

He sat by the radioman, a Sergeant, ignoring the rest of the officers in the converted bomb-bay.

"Hope he makes it, Colonel,"

said the Sergeant.

"He'll make it," Johnny said flatly, irritated. Relenting, he added in a gentler tone, "The pilot section breaks away. If he gets in serious trouble, he can dump it and ride the nose down. Like a bird. He'll make it."

There was a raucous buzz, and a squawk box said: "On my mark it will be Zero minus four minutes . . . mark!" The voice of Control, 35,000 feet below.

The B-52 swung ponderously onto the base leg of its circle, and there was a creaking of stretching metal inside.

"Minus two minutes." *Not my day, anyway*, Johnny thought. He lit another cigarette.

"Control," said a new voice, "This is Red Leader. Red Leader. Red Flight is in position."

"Rog, Red Leader," Control acknowledged. The Observation flight of jet fighters was waiting, too.

"Minus five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one . . . mark!"

Silence.

I had a true wife but I left her . . . oh, oh, oh.

There was another rattle of the speaker, and Mitch's voice came through, grunting, heavy, as the acceleration of the Ship laid a heavy hand on his chest.

"Acceleration . . . eight gee . . . controls respond."

Silence.

"There he is," someone said. A wavering trail of smoke was barely visible below, a thread of white, coming up fast, blown erratically by winds into a distorted tiny snake.

"Altitude . . ." said Mitch's voice,

"40,000 . . . Acceleration . . . dropping."

The white snake wriggled up to their level, rose above them. Johnny could not see the silver head.

"Altitude . . . 65,000 . . . I have a loud, very high buzz in my headphones. I'm going to—there, it's gone now, went out of my range."

His voice sounded wrong to Johnny, but he couldn't pin it down.

"Altitude . . . 105,000. Beginning orbital correction. Beginning—beginning . . . I can't—I'm—I'm—" The voice became unintelligible. It was pitched very high, like a woman's, and it sounded as if his teeth were chattering.

"Mitch," Johnny pleaded softly. "Mitch, baby, Dump it, boy, come on home, now. Dump it."

There was no more from the speaker. A confused babble broke out in the bomb-bay. The Sergeant fiddled with his dials frantically, spinning across wavelengths, trying to find a word. The confusion ceased when the speaker rattled again, seeming hours later.

"Uh, hello, Control, this is Red Three, do you read me?" One of the fighter flight.

"Rog, Red Three, go ahead," came Control's voice from below.

"Uh, Control, I have a flash and smoke cloud on a bearing of three-seven degrees."

"Red Three, what altitude? What altitude?"

"None," said the fighter pilot. "On the deck."

After a moment, Johnny climbed unsteadily to his feet in the midst of a booming silence. He made his

way back along the catwalk to the head, where he retched violently until the tears came to his eyes.

THREE WEEKS later, Johnny sat in Doctor Lambert's office. He watched the lean, graying psychologist turn off the tape recorder, watched him methodically tamp tobacco in his pipe.

"That's all she wrote, Johnny," said Lambert, finally. "That recording of Mitch's voice is just about all we have. The Ship was under full power when it hit. There wasn't much left."

Johnny looked absently out the window at the gleaming needle of Ship II beside the flimsy looking gantry. Full power was a lot of power.

The psychologist followed Johnny's eyes. "Beautiful," he said, and the word brought to Johnny's mind the wide-eyed pale face of Mitch's wife, staring at him.

"That Ship is the best we can make her," Lambert said. "Engineering is as certain as they can be that there was no structural failure on Ship I."

"So?" Johnny said, still staring at the Ship. Even at this distance, he could almost believe he could see his own lean face reflected in the shining metal.

"So we look somewhere else for the cause of failure," said Lambert.

"Where?" said Johnny. He turned back, saw that the psychologist was putting a new reel on the tape recorder.

"The weak link in the control system," Lambert said.

"There weren't any."

"One."

"What?"

"Mitch Campbell."

Johnny stood, angry. "Mitch was good. Damn good."

The psychologist looked up, and his eyes were tired. "I know it," he said calmly. "Listen to this." He started the machine playing the new tape.

Johnny listened to it through. The voice that came out was high and wavering. It shook, it chattered, words were indistinguishable. It was thin with tension, and it rang in Johnny's ears with unwanted familiarity.

"What's it sound like to you?" Lambert asked when it had finished.

"Like Mitch's voice," Johnny admitted reluctantly.

"It did to me, too. What do you think it is?"

"Don't know," said Johnny shortly. "Might be a pilot whose plane is shaking apart."

"No."

"I don't know."

Lambert sat back down behind his desk and sucked on his pipe-stem. He regarded Johnny impassively, seeming to consider some problem remote from the room.

Abruptly, he stood again and went to the window, watching the ant-like activity around the base of Ship II.

"That was a madman's voice," he said. "I made the recording while I was interning at a state institution."

"So?"

"Mad with fear," Lambert said.

"Pure. Simple. Unadulterated. That was the sound of terror you heard, Johnny. Terror such as few humans have ever known. That man knew such fear he could not remain sane and live with it."

I had a true wife but I left her . . . oh, oh, oh.

"You think Mitch—"

"You said yourself the voices were alike." Lambert pointed out.

"I don't believe it."

"Don't have to," said Lambert, turning from the window. "But I'll tell you something, Johnny. That Ship—" he hooked his thumb out the window—"is a very big toy. Maybe too big."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning it's possible we've reached beyond Man's limitations. Meaning it's possible we've built something too big for a man to handle and stay sane. Maybe we've finally gone too far."

"Maybe."

"I don't insist it's true," said the psychologist. "It's an idea. Fear. Fear of the unknown, maybe. Too much fear to hold."

"You think I'll crack?" asked Johnny.

The psychologist didn't answer directly. "It's an idea, as I said. I just wanted you to think it over."

"I will," said Johnny. He stood again, his jaw held tight. "Is that all?"

"Yes, Colonel, that's all," said Lambert.

When Johnny left, the psychologist sat in brooding silence, staring morosely at a trail of blue smoke rising from his pipe bowl. He sat there until the afternoon light faded

from the desert base. Then he stood in the darkened office, sighed, lit his pipe and went home. He was very tired.

SIX WEEKS later Johnny Youngbear walked out of the Control blockhouse into the cold desert morning, carrying his helmet under his arm.

He ran his eyes swiftly up the length of Ship II, trying to forget those other eyes staring at his back from the blockhouse. The Ship rippled and gleamed, alive, eager, the thundering power in her belly waiting to be born.

Oh, you bitch! You beautiful bitch, Johnny thought. *Pregnant with power like a goddess with a god's child. Bitch, bitch, bitch! I love you I hate you. You kill me.*

The crew-chief walked by his side. "Nice morning, Colonel," he said.

"Very," said Johnny.

I had a true wife but I left her . . . oh, oh, oh. For you, you beautiful bitch.

"Say something, Colonel?" asked the crew-chief.

"No. Song running through my head," he explained.

"Yeah," the other man chuckled.

"I know how it is."

They strapped him into the padded control chair, the controls arranged around him in a neat semicircle, easy to reach.

This is my day.

They left him. Alone. *Once around lightly.*

The loneliness was in his belly, aching like a tumor.

"... read me?" Control's voice in his earphones.

"Loud and clear," he said absently.

"... minus two minutes . . . mark!" A different voice. So many different voices. They knew him, they talked to him. But he was alone with his bitch.

I had a true wife but—

"... minus one minute . . . mark!"

This is my day I had a true wife—

"... three . . . two . . . one . . . mark!"

There was the sound of a world dying in his mind, the sound of thunder, the sound of a sun splitting, the sound of a goddess giving birth, with pain with agony in loneliness.

A giant's fist came from out of nothingness and smashed into his body. His chest was compressed, his face was flattened, he could not get enough air to breathe. The heavy sledge of acceleration crushed him back into the padded chair, inexorable, implacable, relentless, heavy. His vision clouded in red and he thought he would die. Instead, he spoke into the lip mike, resenting it bitterly.

"Acceleration . . . nine gee." He looked at the gauge that shimmered redly before him, disbelieving. "Altitude 20,000."

He blacked out, sinking helplessly into the black plush night of unawareness. *I had a true I had I had—*

Awakening to pain, he glanced at the gauges. He had been gone only a split second.

SOUND OF TERROR

"Altitude 28,000 acceleration pressure dropping."

His face began to resume its normal shape as the acceleration dropped. "... six gee," he said, and breathing was easier. The giant reluctantly began to withdraw his massive fist from Johnny's face.

He tipped a lever, watched the artificial horizon tilt slightly. "Air control surfaces respond," he said. But soon there would be no air for the surfaces to move against, and then he would control by flicking the power that rumbled behind him.

"Altitude 40,000 . . ."

"... 85,000 . . ."

"... 100,000 . . ." The sky was glistening black, he was passing from the earth's envelope of air into the nothingness that was space. Now.

Now.

Now it was time to change angle, flatten the ship out, bring it into position to run around the earth. *Once around lightly.*

There was a high-pitched scream in his earphones. He remembered it had been there for long, and wondered if he had told Control.

He flicked the switch that ignited the powerful steering rockets, and the whine grew louder, unbearably loud. It sang to him, his bitch sang *I had a true wife, but I left her . . . oh, oh, oh.*

He began to feel a light tingle over his body, tiny needles delicately jabbing every inch. His face became wooden, felt prickly. He tried to lick his lips and could feel no sensation there. His vision fogged again, and he knew it was not from

acceleration this time, it was something else.

Something else.

What's it like out there?

His belly told him. Fear.

He reached out his hand to touch the control panel, and his arm did not respond. It was shaking, uncontrollably, and moved off to the right of where he wanted it to go. When he tried to correct, it swung too far to the left, waving as if it were alive. It hung there before him as in a dream, oscillating back and forth.

He could not control his body, and the realization nurtured the tiny seed of panic that lay heavily in his belly.

Dump it . . .

What did that mean? *Dump it . . . go home now, baby . . . I had a true . . .*

Decision . . . there was a decision he had to make, but he was too frightened to know what it was.

He had been born in fear and lived in fear and his body was full of it, quivering to the lover's touch of fear. Falling, darkness, the fear of dying, the unknown, the unimaginable always lurking just out of the corner of his eye.

He wanted to scream and the fear choked it off. His hands were at his sides, limply, useless, dangling at the seat. He had to hang on to something. His hand found a projection at the side of the seat. He clutched it desperately.

He knew he would fall, down, spiraling, weightless, off the cliff as in a dream, off the ladder, the tree, he was a child and his toes were tingling as he stood too near the

edge of the cliff, knowing he might fall.

He clutched tightly, putting every ounce of his strength into holding on to the lever, the single solid reality in a world of shifting unreality. He was going to fall he was falling I love you I hate you I had a true wife . . .

THERE WAS softness beneath his back, and he moved his hands, feeling the crispness of sheets. There was a low murmur of voices. He raised his hands to his eyes and the voices stopped. There were heavy bandages on his eyes.

"Colonel?" came a questioning voice, and Johnny realized it was Doctor Lambert. "Awake?"

"I can't see. Why can't I see?"

"You'll be all right. It's all right."

"What happened?"

"How much do you remember?" asked the voice. "The blast-off?"

"Yes—yes, I remember that."

"The orbit? The landing?"

"No," he said. "Not that."

"You did it," said the voice. "You made it."

This is my day. Once around lightly.

"Johnny," said the voice. "I don't know just how to say this. We know what was wrong with Ship I, and why it killed Mitch. We know—hell, we don't even begin to realize what we have at our fingertips now. It's so big it's impossible to evaluate."

"What? I don't—"

"Sound, Johnny, sound. Or rather, vibration. It's something we're just beginning to learn about."

We know a few things; we know you can boil water with sound if the frequency is high enough. And you can drill metal with it—and it does things to the human body.

"There are frequencies of sound which can act directly on human nerves, directly on the human brain. It means that if we know the right frequency, we'll be able to produce any state we want in a man, any emotion. Fear, anguish, anything.

"When the steering rockets were cut in, the Ship began to vibrate. It generated frequencies so high that ordinary human senses couldn't detect them. And when your nerves were exposed to those vibrations, it produced fear. Pure and absolute fear. Motor control went, rational processes went, all the nervous functions of the body went out of control. Your body became a giant tuning fork, and the frequency to which it vibrated was fear.

"I can't remember—"

"Sanity went, too, Johnny," said the man softly. "You could not

stand that fear and remain sane, so something cut off. That was what happened to Mitch."

"How did I get back?"

"We don't know. The films show your face suddenly going blank. Then you flew. That's all. We hoped you could tell us."

"No. No—I don't remember—"

"There was something in you so strong it overrode everything else, even the fear. We'd like to know what it is. We'll find out, Johnny, and it will mean a lot to the human race when we do."

This is my day.

"Is my wife here?"

There was a cool hand on his forehead. "Yes, Johnny."

"Well," he said helplessly. "Well, how are you?"

"I'm fine, Johnny," she whispered, and there was the sound of tears in her voice. "I'm just fine."

He felt the warm softness of her lips on his.

I had a true wife but I left her . . . oh, oh, oh.

And then he came home again.

END



Service with a Smile

Herbert was truly a gentleman robot. The ladies' slightest wish was his command . . .

BY CHARLES L.
FONTENAY

HERBERT bowed with a muted clank—indicating he probably needed oiling somewhere—and presented Alice with a perfect martini on a silver tray. He stood holding the tray, a white, permanent porcelain smile on his smooth metal face, as Alice sipped the drink and grimaced.



Illustrated by Paul Orban

"It's a good martini, Herbert," said Alice. "Thank you. But, damn-it, I wish you didn't have that everlasting smile!"

"I am very sorry, Miss Alice, but I am unable to alter myself in any way," replied Herbert in his polite, hollow voice.

He retired to a corner and stood impassively, still holding the tray. Herbert had found a silver deposit and made the tray. Herbert had found sand and made the cocktail glass. Herbert had combined God knew what atmospheric and earth chemicals to make what tasted like gin and vermouth, and Herbert had frozen the ice to chill it.

"Sometimes," said Thera wistfully, "it occurs to me it would be better to live in a mud hut with a real man than in a mansion with Herbert."

The four women lolled comfortably in the living room of their spacious house, as luxurious as anything any of them would have known on distant Earth. The rugs were thick, the furniture was overstuffed, the paintings on the walls were aesthetic and inspiring, the shelves were filled with booktapes and musictapes.

Herbert had done it all, except the booktapes and musictapes, which had been salvaged from the wrecked spaceship.

"Do you suppose we'll ever escape from this best of all possible manless worlds?" asked Betsy, fluffing her thick black hair with her fingers and inspecting herself in a Herbert-made mirror.

"I don't see how," answered blond Alice glumly. "That atmos-

pheric trap would wreck any other ship just as it wrecked ours, and the same magnetic layer prevents any radio message from getting out. No, I'm afraid we're a colony."

"A colony perpetuates itself," reminded sharp-faced Marguerite, acidly. "We aren't a colony, without men."

They were not the prettiest four women in the universe, nor the youngest. The prettiest women and the youngest did not go to space. But they were young enough and healthy enough, or they could not have gone to space.

It had been a year and a half now—an Earth year and a half on a nice little planet revolving around a nice little yellow sun. Herbert, the robot, was obedient and versatile and had provided them with a house, food, clothing, anything they wished created out of the raw elements of earth and air and water. But the bones of all the men who had been aspace with these four ladies lay mouldering in the wreckage of their spaceship.

And Herbert could not create a man. Herbert did not have to have direct orders, and he had tried once to create a man when he had overheard them wishing for one. They had buried the corpse—perfect in every detail except that it never had been alive.

"It's been a hot day," said Alice, fanning her brow. "I wish it would rain."

Silently, Herbert moved from his corner and went out the door.

Marguerite gestured after him with a bitter little laugh.

"It'll rain this afternoon," she

said. "I don't know how Herbert does it—maybe with silver iodide. But it'll rain. Wouldn't it have been simpler to get him to air-condition the house, Alice?"

"That's a good idea," said Alice thoughtfully. "We should have had him do it before."

HERBERT had not quite completed the task of air-conditioning the house when the other spaceship crashed. They all rushed out to the smoking site—the four women and Herbert.

It was a tiny scoutship, and its single occupant was alive.

He was unconscious, but he was alive. And he was a man!

They carted him back to the house, tenderly, and put him to bed. They hovered over him like four hens over a single chick, waiting and watching for him to come out of his coma, while Herbert scurried about creating and administering the necessary medicines.

"He'll live," said Thera happily. Thera had been a space nurse. "He'll be on his feet and walking around in a few weeks."

"A man!" murmured Betsy, with something like awe in her voice. "I could almost believe Herbert brought him here in answer to our prayers."

"Now, girls," said Alice, "we have to realize that a man brings problems, as well as possibilities."

There was a matter-of-fact hardness to her tone which almost masked the quiver behind it. There was a defiant note of competition

there which had not been heard on this little planet before.

"What do you mean?" asked Thera.

"I know what she means," said Marguerite, and the new hardness came natural to her. "She means, which one of us gets him?"

Betsy, the youngest, gasped, and her mouth rounded to a startled O. Thera blinked, as though she were coming out of a daze.

"That's right," said Alice. "Do we draw straws, or do we let him choose?"

"Couldn't we wait?" suggested Betsy timidly. "Couldn't we wait until he gets well?"

Herbert came in with a new thermometer and poked it into the unconscious man's mouth. He stood by the bed, waiting patiently.

"No, I don't think we can," said Alice. "I think we ought to have it all worked out and agreed on, so there won't be any dispute about it."

"I say, draw straws," said Marguerite. Marguerite's face was thin, and she had a skinny figure.

Betsy, the youngest, opened her mouth, but Thera forestalled her.

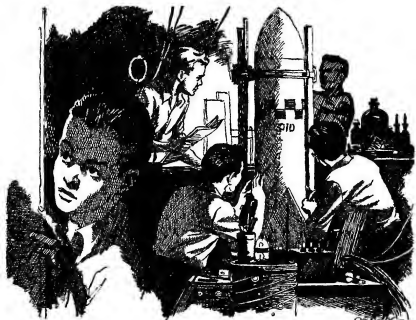
"We are not on Earth," she said firmly, in her soft, mellow voice. "We don't have to follow terrestrial customs, and we shouldn't. There's only one solution that will keep everybody happy—all of us and the man."

"And that is . . .?" asked Marguerite drily.

"Polygamy, of course. He must belong to us all."

Betsy shuddered but, surprisingly, she nodded.

(Continued on page 112)



Illustrated by Paul Orban

A Mixture of Genius

Who, but the imaginative young, shall inherit the stars?

BY ARNOLD CASTLE

THE SLEEK transcontinental airliner settled onto one of the maze of runways that was Stevenson Airport. With its turbojets

fading to a dense roar, it taxied across the field toward the central building. Inside the plane a red light went off.

Senator Vance Duran unhooked the seat belt, reached for his briefcase, and stepped into the crowded aisle. The other passengers were all strangers, which had meant that for nearly an hour he had been able to give his full attention to the several hundred pages of proposed legislation and reports presented to the Committee on Extraterrestrial Development, of which he was chairman. But now there would be reporters, local political pleaders, the dinner at the Governor's, and the inevitable unexpected interruptions which were a part of every trip home.

As he strode through the door and onto the mobile escalator, he donned his smile of tempered confidence in the economic future of the nation. A television camera went into action at once and newsmen formed a small circle at the bottom of the ramp.

"That was a great little debate you put on with Ben Wickolm last week," one of the reporters said. "You really tied him up."

"You can thank Senator Wickolm for arousing me," Duran answered, observing to himself that perhaps *all* of his efforts on the Hill did not go unnoticed in his home state, if most of them seemed to.

"What do you think, Senator, of the FCC's modified ruling on the integrated lunar relay station plan?" another asked.

"I haven't had time to get fully acquainted with it," the senator evaded, stepping onto the ground and out of the way of the ramp.

"Say, Senator, what about the

Mars colony project?" a third put in. "How come it's bogged down?"

"No comment at present," the senator said. But he gave them an ambiguous little grimace which was meant to suggest a minor but sticky snarl behind the scenes. He hoped it would satisfy them for the moment.

Making his escape as quickly as possible, he climbed onto the shuttle car already loaded down with the other passengers. Finding an empty seat, he folded himself into it, and was immediately joined by someone else.

"Well, Senator, how does it feel to be home?" his companion asked with sympathetic irony.

Duran turned, grinned, and reached for the man's hand.

"Great, Wayne," he answered, recognizing an old friend who had been of no small aid during his earlier years in politics. "Say, I'd ask you over for dinner if we weren't going to the Governor's tonight. Molly would love to see you. Unfortunately I'm leaving for Washington again in the morning."

"Why doesn't Molly move to D.C. with you, Vance?" the journalist asked.

Duran hesitated. "Maybe in a year or so. After the boys are out of highschool. *If* I get the job again."

The smile on the younger man's face was heartening.

"Don't play coy with me, Vance. You know you've got this state sewed up." Then came the slight frown of doubt. "Just one thing, though. A lot of people are wondering why the hold up on the colony project. You're bound to

get a little of the criticism. What the hell's wrong, anyway?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Yeah. I can guess. There's only one possibility, since the government scientists assure us they've ironed out all the technical wrinkles. But it's pretty hard to believe that out of the thousands of people who volunteer every week, not even a couple of hundred are acceptable."

Duran considered his answer carefully before voicing it.

"Ever ask yourself *who* volunteers, Wayne?"

The journalist looked at him oddly, then nodded.

THE SENATOR took an elevator directly to the helicopter landing on the roof of the building. It was several minutes before he had located the little runabout he had bought for his wife the previous Christmas. Jack Woodvale, their caretaker, gardener, and chauffeur was just retrieving his suitcase from the baggage lift as the senator arrived.

Waiting until Woodvale had secured the suitcase in the luggage compartment and climbed into the pilot's seat, Duran squeezed himself into the cabin. A minute or two later the little craft was rising from the port, directed automatically into the appropriate channel and guided off toward the city.

"How've things been going, Jack?" the senator asked. He felt good. Wayne's friendship and assurances had provided a needed boost. "Everything okay?"

"I'd say so, sir," Woodvale told him. "Had a little trouble with the solar screen. The store sent a man out to fix it. It's all right now."

The new power unit had been another of Molly's ideas, Duran recalled. The old crystal sulfide screen had been perfectly reliable. But Molly had thought it looked ugly up there on the roof. Molly's main faults, he decided, derived from her concern with the neighbors' opinions.

"Oh, there was something else came up while I was on my way out to get you," Woodvale continued abruptly. "The state's Attorney General called—said it was important you contact him immediately."

Duran sensed anger surging up as he remembered the times when, as District Attorney, Sig Loeffler had openly snubbed him. That, of course, had been back in the days when Duran had been a junior partner in one of the city's smaller law firms. He had not forgiven Loeffler, nor had Loeffler given him any reason to do so. Only the Governor's back-slapping mediation had allowed them to reach a politically stable relationship. The relationship did not involve Duran's compliance with the man's whims, however.

"Get him on the phone, Jack," Duran said at last. "But just make one call. If he's not at his office, forget it."

In less than a minute Woodvale was turning around to say:

"He's in, sir. You want to talk to him?"

Duran grunted and lifted the

phone from the clamp beside his seat.

"Senator Duran speaking," he said.

"Vance, this is Loeffler," boomed a voice in considerable contrast to the senator's own mild tone. "Something pretty fantastic has happened. We're trying to keep it quiet, at least until we decide on what action to take. But if you can make it over here some time this evening, I'll tell you the story. You're going to be in on it eventually, and I thought you'd prefer getting in on it early."

Duran had intended quite bluntly to explain that he had more important business. But there was something compelling about the man's apparently ingenuous urgency that caused the senator to change his mind.

"Okay, Loeffler. I'll be right over."

He broke the contact and told Woodvale to dial his home number.

"Ernie, this is Dad," he said at the sound of his younger son's voice. "Tell Mother I'm going to stop off at the Attorney General's office—that's right—but that I'll be home in plenty of time to get ready for the dinner. Got that? That's right. How's school? Something wrong? Okay, son, I'll see you later."

Ernie had said that everything was all right, but with an uneasiness in the way he spoke. Grades, maybe, Duran thought. The boy had been doing pretty well, almost as well as Roger, but was showing the inevitable adolescent ramifications of interest. Duran found himself musing briefly upon his own

youthful extra-curricular forays up the tree of knowledge and sighed.

"Go to the capitol building, Jack," he said.

"Which port should I use, sir?" the younger man asked.

"The official one," Duran told him. This was Loeffler's idea.

The senator was surprised to find one of the Attorney General's harried-looking secretaries working late. She glanced up from her typewriter and gave him an equivocal smile of recognition.

"He's expecting you, Mr. Senator," she said, nodding toward the inner office. "Go right in."

Sigmund Loeffler was not alone. But the two other visitors were paled by the aura of importance which emanated from the large black-haired man behind the desk. He rose grandly at Duran's entrance, and without bothering to shake hands proceeded with introductions.

"Fritz Ambly, Senator Vance Duran. Fritz," he explained, "is chairman of the state Youth Welfare Board."

Duran took the thin hand which the other extended to him and noted the concern on the man's slim freckled face. His features were appropriately almost those of a child, but of a worried child.

"And Bob Duff, Senator Duran," Loeffler went on. "Bob is head of our Civil Defense now."

The second man was, in contrast, short and homely, but not without a touch of the other's anxiety.

"Well, gentlemen, you're welcome to stay if you wish," the At-

torney General told them. "I'll have to repeat all the facts to Senator Duran, of course."

"I'd better be off," Ambly said. "Perhaps I'll see you at the Governor's tonight?"

"Not me, I'm afraid," Loeffler told him. "The DA and I have a little problem to work out together. I'll call you both tomorrow about the press release."

"We can't wait too long," said Duff. "Rumors can be a lot worse than the truth. Especially about something like this. In fact, I don't see the point in waiting at all."

"Tomorrow, Bob. Tomorrow," Loeffler promised. "Noon at the latest."

His heavy smile faded as the two visitors closed the door behind them. With an unthrottled groan, he lowered himself into the chair and turned his dark gaze upon the senator.

"They think *they* have troubles," he said.

"And you think *I* have," Duran returned, seating himself.

"I know *you* do. Unfortunately I happen to share them to some extent."

He paused to relight the stub of a cigar, then went on.

"It's a crazy world we live in, Vance. Things change. Sometimes it's hard for us adults to keep up with it. The kids seem to, though."

Duran tried to appear suavely bored with the other's musings. But in spite of himself he could sense his gaze becoming intently expectant. Whatever connection there might be between himself, Ambly, and Duff completely eluded him.

And that elusive connection had aroused his curiosity.

"Yeah, they keep up with things, all right," Loeffler went on. "And sometimes they get some pretty big ideas."

He halted, puffed thoughtfully, then barked:

"Remember Mel Skinner's lodge out on that island in Wakataoga Lake? Big Spanish-style place. Built it for that wife of his he brought back from Chile or somewhere."

"Yes, I remember it. Molly and I spent a weekend there a couple of years ago. Why?" the senator asked, realizing more than ever how much he disliked Sigmund Loeffler. "What are you getting at?"

"Well, the next time you go you'd better take along some sleeping bags," said Loeffler. "Because the house isn't there anymore."

"Okay," Duran said, strangely anxious. "Let's forget the riddles and get down to business. What happened to Mel Skinner's hacienda?"

The Attorney General stared at his guest for a moment, before remarking harshly:

"It got blown up."

"A bomb, you mean?" Duran asked.

"Oh, no, no—nothing so crude as that. This was a guided missile. With a warhead."

The senator was thinking fast now, but still the pattern eluded him.

"Not an act of war, surely?" he remarked.

"More like an act of revolution," Loeffler told him. "Because the agents behind it were *kids*. Kids

from our state, our city. Kids from decent homes, educated families. Bright kids. Happy kids. Kids with every opportunity. *Kids who ought to know better—*"

"Hold it, Loeffler!" Duran interrupted, rising from the chair to place both hands on the edge of the desk. "Just one question—was anyone killed or injured?"

The other man hesitated melodramatically, then looked down at his cigar.

"No. There was no one on the island. The place had been closed down for the winter. That's the only pleasant thing about it."

Duran found it such unexpectedly good news that he was actually able to smile when he dropped back into the chair.

"In other words, Loeffler, it was a prank."

But the Attorney General seemed not to see it in precisely that light.

"A prank, yes!" he exploded. "A hundred thousand dollar prank! My God, Vance, don't you see what those boys did? They demonstrated the grossest lack of respect for private property. And what if they'd miscalculated? That rocket was fired from a distance of some fifty or sixty miles. It could have killed any number of people along its course had it fallen short."

"Well, I'll admit it's not the sort of thing I'd like to see encouraged," said Duran. "Now give me the details. Who were they? Where did they get the rocket? What was the point of it, anyway?"

Sigmund Loeffler opened a folder which lay on his desk and started sifting through its contents. He

pulled out several memoranda and a list of names, closing the folder again.

"There was a gang of eight, all in the eleventh or twelfth grades at Eisenhower High. Five of them were members of the school rocket club. Three of them had juvenile delinquency records—minor stuff, mostly, like copter stunting and public disturbance. The youngest had won a couple of science awards for demonstrations in—" he glanced significantly at the senator, "the chemistry of explosives."

Duran said nothing, but his sense of concern was growing.

"Let's see," Loeffler went on. "Two of the boys were taking vocational courses. One had his own machine shop, in fact. Then there was the electronics expert—Ceasar Grasso's son—know him?"

The senator nodded.

"He runs the highschool T-V station. Knows a lot about radio, I understand. Oh, yes. There was also the lad who drew up the plans for the gadget. Pretty sharp at engineering design, they say—"

Duran peered numbly across the desk at the grim faced official. This was what he had been fearing all along. But despite his apprehension, he was not entirely ready for it.

"That, I suppose," he said quietly, "was my son Roger."

Loeffler nodded slowly. "That was your boy, Vance. Sorry I had to be the one to break it to you."

"But where is he?" Duran asked. "And does Molly know about it?"

"She knows he's been detained, but not how serious the charges are."

"Just how serious *are* the charges?"

"I don't know yet," said Loeffler. "That's not really my province, of course," said Loeffler. "But the problem is complicated by the fact that Lake Wakataoga is state property, with the island merely leased to Skinner."

Duran fumbled through his pockets for his cigarettes. He found them and lit one.

"When did this happen?" he asked, aware that the painfully tangled knot in his stomach was beginning to untie itself.

"This afternoon around one-thirty. A couple of guys fishing on the lake saw the explosion and called the local civil defense headquarters. They claim they heard the rocket fall. Damned near had a war scare till the pieces were found. They were easy enough to trace, and the kids gave themselves away by all eight of them being awol from their one o'clock classes. Especially since five of them were absent from a physics class—that was one class they never cut."

"I don't see how they managed to go all the way through with it without someone finding out," Duran said, bewilderedly.

"I know," agreed Loeffler, nodding. "That's the way we all felt. But they admit doing it—hell, they're proud of it!—and we found the shed where the thing was assembled."

"I don't suppose they offered any motive," Duran said.

"Oh, sure. They claim they'd been planning it ever since Skinner wouldn't let them land copters on

the island. Pretty weak, huh?"

The senator made no response.

"Well, Vance, I guess you'll want to talk to the boy," Loeffler concluded. "I had him brought up here. Figured it would be best all around that way. I knew you had to get back to Washington tomorrow and probably wouldn't have time to see him then. Shall I have him come in?"

When Duran hesitated, he added, "Oh, I've got to duck out for a few minutes. Get some supper. Got a long evening ahead of me."

"Okay, Loeffler, send him in. And—" This was the hardest part. "And I appreciate this."

"No trouble, Vance," the man said, rising and stepping around the desk. "No more than we've got already."

He removed a suit coat from a hanger and left the office with it under his arm. A moment later the door opened again and the senator saw the shaggy head of his older son peer into the room. The boy was the one who finally broke the silence which followed.

"Hi, Dad," he said, sauntering casually into the office. "Guess you're pretty sore at me. Can't blame you."

Duran remained seated, indicating a chair against one wall. He waited till his son had sat down.

"I'm a little dumbfounded, Rog, that's all. I suppose you had a good reason for it."

"Sure. Old skinflint Skinner wouldn't let us—"

"Roger!" the senator growled threateningly. He was not going to allow the interview to start off with

a half-truth.

"Yeah, but that's state land," the boy persisted. "He hadn't any right—"

"Roger, I said a *good* reason."

"Okay, Dad," he sighed. "No, we didn't have *that* kind of a reason."

"What it amounted to," Duran said, "was that you wanted to do something spectacular like building a rocket and firing it at something. Only to be fun it had to be illegal, if not immoral. And Melvin Skinner's place seemed like the least objectionable target. Isn't that about it?"

"Yeah, I guess so. Only we had just about finished the rocket before we started wondering about a target. That was the trouble. Once we'd built it, we had to do something with it."

"How to you think that's going to sound in court?"

"I don't know, Dad. You're the lawyer."

Duran cringed, but tried not to show it.

"Roger," he said slowly. "Flippancy is the easiest defense, and the least effective. I hope you won't feel you have to resort to it too often."

The boy said nothing.

"Well, tell me about it," his father suggested, sensing his son's isolation.

"About what?"

"The rocket. Wouldn't a jet have been easier to make?"

"A rocket was cheaper."

The source of the money required for the project was something Duran had overlooked. However, it was, he realized, one best

postponed for the present. The important thing now was to regain his son's confidence.

"Did you design it?"

"Yeah. Well, I drew it up. Nothing very original about it. But it was a good little machine."

Duran noticed the boy's restless squirming, saw him perfunctorily place a hand to the baggy pocket of his jacket and quickly withdraw it, then arrived at a decision. Reaching into his own coat, Duran took out the pack of cigarettes, extending it to his son.

"Care for a cigarette?" he asked.

The youth looked at him doubtfully for an instant. Then he smiled his first smile that evening.

"Thanks, Dad," he responded, taking one and lighting it self-consciously. He added, "You've been out of town so much, I didn't think you knew I'd started—"

"I know, Rog," the man said, aware of a rising flood of self-condemnation. "Go on, son. About the rocket. What kind of fuel did you use?"

"Oh, nothing special. It had a liquid bi-propellant motor. We used ethanol and liquid oxygen. Pretty old-fashioned. But we didn't know how to get hold of the fancier stuff, and didn't have any way of synthesizing it. Then, at the last minute, we found that one of the valves feeding into the nozzle was clogged up. That's why we were late to class."

"Couldn't that have been dangerous?" Duran asked, and realized at once that he had said the wrong thing.

The boy merely shrugged.

"Well, it must have been a pretty good machine if it flew sixty miles and hit its target," Duran went on.

"Oh, we had it radio-controlled, with a midget T.V. transmitter mounted in it. Grasso took care of that. He did a terrific job. Of course, it was pretty expensive."

He glanced at his father tentatively for a moment, then bent his gaze to the cigarette.

"I don't have my car any more. But I guess I won't be needing it now."

There was a cautious knock on the door.

"Listen, Rog," Duran began, "I'll try to get to see you tomorrow before I leave. Remember that your mother and I are both on your side, without qualification. You've done a pretty terrible thing, of course. But I have to admit, at the same time, that I'm really rather proud of you. Does that make sense?"

"Sure," said Roger huskily, "I guess so."

THE FLIGHT home was a quiet one. Duran found himself with many thoughts to think, not the least of which was what his wife's reaction would be. The difficulty lay in the fact that their married life had been too easy, too free of tragedy, to enable him to foresee her response. But life would not be quite the same now, even if Roger escaped the more concrete forms of punishment. And perhaps it would be the most difficult for Ernest, who would forever be expected either to live up to or down to his older brother's reputation. When all

A MIXTURE OF GENIUS

poor Ernest seemed to want these days was to play the saxophone.

And then there was his own political future to consider. This would certainly not help it. But perhaps the affair would be forgotten in the next three years. After all, it might have been far worse. It might have happened in a campaign year. This way he still had a fighting chance. Three sessions with a good record might overbalance the loss in public confidence this would incur. And then he thought of the Mars colony mess and winced.

Telling his wife about the matter was not nearly so difficult as the senator had feared. She had been ready for news of a crime of passion, or at least of armed robbery. What her husband had to relate stunned her at first. But once she had ridden out the shock, she recovered quickly.

"You don't have to go tonight, Molly," Duran told her.

"You think it might look better if I didn't?" she asked gently.

"That wasn't what I was getting at," he said. He thought it over for a moment, then added, "No, I don't. In fact, I think it would look better if we both went to the Governor's. Roger is not a juvenile delinquent. That, I believe, is understood. If we must accept some of the responsibility for what he did today, then let's do so gracefully. Were you to stay home tonight, it might appear to some that you had reason to be ashamed of the business, which you don't."

"It might also look as if I were afraid that Ernest might do some-

thing similar, as if I felt I had to watch him," she said. "Oh, people can be so ridiculous! Why wasn't Millie Gorton's boy in on it?"

Duran smiled at the idea of the Governor's tubby, obtuse son involved in the construction of anything more demanding than a paper glider.

The Governor's mansion, a century old edifice typifying the moribund tendency to confuse dignity with discomfort, was teeming with professional and political personages when the Durans arrived. The dinner went off routinely, with no overt references made to the missile matter. However, the senator noticed that no one inquired into the health and happiness of his two sons, so that he presumed word had got around.

It was not until after dinner, when he had seated himself alone in a corner of the luxurious old living room, a B and B in one hand and a cigar in the other, that his host approached him.

"Evenin', Vance. Sure glad you could make it," exclaimed the familiarly jovial voice of Governor Will Gorton.

Duran sat down his drink and took the Governor's plump hand, shaking it vigorously. Then the senator observed the intense youngish face of Fritz Ambly, who had followed the Governor.

"Guess you know Fritz," Gorton went on, seating himself next to Duran. "Says he met you at Sig's office this afternoon."

"That's right," Duran said. "Good to see you again, Ambly."

The Youth Welfare board chairman nodded affably and took the remaining chair. His look of concern had mellowed somewhat with the evening. But the pale close eyes remained set in an expression of aggressive earnestness.

"How's Roger?" Gorton asked, after a moment's silence.

"As normal as ever," said Duran, unprepared for the question. Then, slyly, he added, "Thanks for talking Loeffler into letting me see him."

"Well, Sig agreed it was the only thing to do, after I told him you'd be leaving for Washington again tomorrow," the Governor said.

Duran grinned wryly. It had been a guess, but a good one. And Loeffler's having passed the interview off as a personal favor put their relationship back in its proper perspective.

"Well, what's to be done about the boys? They're all under eighteen, I suppose."

"That's right," Gorton said. "It's entirely a matter for the juvenile authority. At least we're going to try to keep it there. But there's more to it than that. Which is why Fritz is here. He has something on his mind which he thinks is pretty important. I do too."

"You see, Senator," said Ambly, coming in promptly on his cue, "it's this way. If the case were an isolated one, it would be easy enough for us to deal with. But it's part of a pattern which few people have yet noticed. Let me cite several other similar incidents.

"Perhaps you read about the group of fifty teen-aged copter

jockeys who decided to hold a transcontinental scavenger hunt. Ignoring all air-traffic regulations, they managed to run up the magnificent total of seventeen collisions and thirty-two casualties."

"Hear about that one, Vance?" the Governor asked, his earlier festiveness gone.

"Yes, I think I saw something about it," Duran said. "It was pretty unfortunate, but—"

"And then there was the case of the promising young New England biologist who was discovered to have evolved a particularly deadly strain of bacteria, which he had been toting around with him in an aspirin bottle," Ambly went on, his thin hands clasped tightly in front of him. "Of course, at the age of sixteen, one perhaps can't be expected to foresee all of the possible consequences.

"So let us consider the two seventeen-year-olds who caused something of a sensation in Florida when they used the Branski-Baker method of genetic exchange to breed a quite fabulous species of winged alligator. Several of these so called 'allibats' escaped into the everglades, but it is doubted that they will be able to reproduce themselves. At least there is *some* doubt."

The senator reached for his drink and sipped it thoughtfully. He was beginning to see Roger's gang's misadventure in a new light. But it was an unfamiliar light, one that would take him a while to become accustomed to.

"Perhaps the most startling case of all," Ambly went on, "concerns the Nuclear Fission Society of Ura-

nia, Nevada. It is not a well publicized fact that this quasi-academic group of adolescent physicists was exposed in the act of assembling an elementary but workable atomic bomb. Many of the elders in this fast-growing little community are engaged, as you no doubt know, in atomic development of one sort or another. It seemed that this interest had trickled down to their offspring, who showed an impressive amount of ingenuity in getting the necessary materials. Fortunately, one youngster asked his father entirely too many questions concerning the actual fabrication of fission weapons. The man investigated and—"

"Now, wait a minute," Duran interrupted, wondering momentarily if the whole tale might not have been a hoax. "How much of this am I really expected to believe?"

"It's all fact, Vance," Governor Gorton responded solemnly. "Fritz has a couple of scrapbooks I'd like you to look at some time. Each case is pretty well authenticated. But the important thing is the pattern. It's really sort of frightening in a way."

"Many similar incidents have no doubt occurred of which I have no record," said Ambly. "I'd estimate that ninety percent of such cases are suppressed, either in the interest of national security or because the children's parents are sufficiently influential to have the story squelched."

"Just as we'd have sat on this one," added Gorton, "if the dang thing hadn't actually been shot off."

Duran smiled inwardly at the

picture evoked by the Governor's metaphor. However, he had to admit that the press would in all probability not have learned about the rocket at all, had it been discovered prior to being launched.

"Still," he remarked, "it's odd that the papers haven't shown more of an interest in it."

"I wrote an article on the subject some time ago," Ambly told him, "but was never able to get it published. It seems that people, for the most part, are more interested in the traditional sordid-sensational type of juvenile delinquency.

"Whereas, this is something different, something unique. It isn't the result of poverty or broken homes, ignorance or twisted personalities—this is a mixture of genius, knowledge, restlessness, and something else I don't think we understand."

"What do you suggest be done about it?" Duran asked.

"Well, the first step," said Ambly, "is to get Congress to recognize the problem for what it is. And even that won't be easy."

"That's where you're supposed to come in," the Governor said, grinning a little guiltily. "Fritz has been tryin' to get me to talk to you about it for some months. I've got to admit, though, that the business this afternoon involvin' your son was what finally convinced me you might be sold."

"I'm sold, Will," Duran told him. "But what's the solution? We can't supervise the activities of every kid in the country with an IQ above a hundred and ten. Anyway, they're too limited as it is. That, it seems to

me, is part of the trouble. And we can't hold their parents accountable. Responsibility has to be an individual matter. So what's the solution?"

Governor Gorton raised a quizzical eyebrow at Fritz Ambly, who in turn merely shrugged. The senator glanced at each of them, then down at his drink.

"So there isn't one," he said.

"Whatever it is," said Ambly, "it won't be simple or painless. There's only one such solution, and that's the time-honored technique of letting them grow into maturity. And even that is far from painless and simple to those doing the growing, nor is it always the solution."

"Yet you're convinced this—" the senator paused briefly, "phenomenon constitutes a danger to the nation?"

Ambly merely smiled. But very, very grimly.

"Well, think it over, Vance," the Governor said, getting to his feet. "Say, there are a couple of hydroponics men here somewhere who are pretty interested in meetin' you. You've heard of Van Neef Industries. He's one of 'em."

So much for the welfare of the nation, Duran thought with a taste of bitterness. *Now back to politics.*

But he finished off his drink, and put out his cigar, and rose to follow the Governor. Politics, after all, was the reason he had come.

IT WAS two a.m. before Senator Vance Duran wearily dropped into bed. But he found no rest in sleep that night. For in his dreams

he seemed to see a youngster walking, now through a forest, now through a city, now through an autumn countryside. And in the boy's hand was a tightly capped bottle. And the expression on his face was an enigma . . .

Early the next morning Jack Woodvale parked the helicopter in a lot back of the city youth detention home. Five minutes later the senator was again talking to his older son.

"I have to get back to Washington this morning, Roger," he said. "I've scheduled a committee meeting for ten-thirty. I suppose I could call it off, but we've got to do something about the Mars colony project before public apathy forces us to drop the whole thing. You understand, don't you?"

"Sure," the boy said with apparent indifference. "Maybe you should have let *me* volunteer. You'd have solved two problems at the same time."

"Now, Roger—" Duran began. But he stopped, suddenly alert.

"Son, you weren't ever serious about that, were you? I mean all that talk I used to hear about your wanting to go to one of the planets?"

"Ah, I don't know, Dad—"

"Please, Roger, you've got to be honest with me. I want to know exactly how you feel about it. I know you've tried before, and I refused to take you seriously. I realize that. But now—now tell me the truth."

And the curious thing was, he realized, that he wanted to hear from his son what he feared most to hear.

"Well—sure, I wanted to go," his son said. "I kept telling you, didn't I? Of course, I wouldn't want to go unless some of the gang were going too."

"You really think that you'd be willing to leave Earth, your home, your family—"

Duran hesitated angrily, knowing it was the wrong approach. He waited a moment, then began again.

"I'm not condemning you for it, Roger. I just find it hard to believe. And I have to be sure you know what you'd be sacrificing."

"I think I do, Dad," Roger said. "But you've got to make a break sometime. I guess there'd be some girls going along, wouldn't there?"

Duran grinned numbly.

"I guess there would, son," he said.

THE SENATOR watched the land of his home state sink rapidly into the morning haze as the jetliner soared upward. It was a sight he had seen often, but never with the sense of challenge he experienced now. For every moment brought him closer to what beyond all doubt would be the toughest fight of his political career. But he felt that he had logic on his side, though sentiment would very probably be against him.

He sat back, lit a cigarette, and considered the irony of the situation. When legislation had been passed authorizing the Department of Extraterrestrial Development to start the colony project, a list of criteria had been drawn up for the

would-be settler. It had meticulously specified the requirements of health, intelligence, and adaptability. And most rigidly adhered to of all had been the provision that the applicant be over the age of twenty-five. For, above all, it was assumed, a colonist must be mature.

And in that assumption, Duran concluded, had been hidden the fallacy which had made a fiasco of the project. For was not maturity largely a matter of finding an acceptable place for oneself in the

scheme of things? Was not maturity essentially a realistic, but wholly irrevocable, resignation? If so, it had been inevitable that those who came to volunteer would, for the most part, be the misfits and the malcontents, men who hoped to escape the imagined or to find the imaginary.

The mature, the resigned, had assuredly inherited the earth. Only the young could seek the stars.

END

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Illustrated by Paul Orban

High Dragon Bump

BY DON THOMPSON

*If it took reduction or torch
hair, the Cirissins wanted a
bump. Hokum, thistle, gluck.*

A YOUNG and very beautiful girl with golden blond hair and smooth skin the color of creamed sweet potatoes floated in the middle of the windowless metal room into which Wayne Brighton drifted. The girl was not exactly naked, but her few filmy clothes concealed nothing.

Wayne cleared his throat, his ap-

prehension changing rapidly to confusion.

"You are going to *reduce* me?" he asked.

"The word is seduce, mister," the girl said. "They told me reduce, too, but they don't talk real good, and I think I'm supposed to seduce you so you'll tell 'em something, and then they'll let me go. I guess. I hope. What is it they wantcha to tell 'em?"

Wayne cleared his throat again, striving merely to keep a firm grip on his sanity. Things had been happening much too fast for him to have retained anything like his customary composure.

He said, "Well, they want me to get them a, uh—well, a high dragon bump." He pronounced the words carefully.

"So why dontcha?" the girl asked.

Wayne's voice rose. "I don't even know what it is. I told them and they don't believe me. Now you're here! I suppose if I can't be reduced—seduced—into getting them one, it will wind up with torch hair. Believe me, I never heard of a high dragon bump."

"Now, don't get panicky!" the girl pleaded. "After all, I'm scared too."

"I am not scared!" Wayne replied indignantly. But he realized that he was.

So far, in the hour or so he'd been a captive of the Cirissins, he'd managed to keep his fright pretty well subdued. He'd understood almost at once what had happened, and his first reaction had not been terror or even any great degree of

surprise.

He was a scientist and he had a scientist's curiosity.

And at first the Cirissins—or the one that had done all the talking—had been cooperative in answering his questions. But then, when he wasn't able to comprehend what they meant by high dragon bump, they'd started getting impatient.

"What's your name?" he asked the girl. She was making gentle swimming motions with her hands and feet, moving gradually closer to him.

"Sheilah," she said. "Sheilah Ralue. I'm a model. I pose for pitchers. You know—for sexy magazines and calendars and stuff like that."

"I see. You were posing when—?"

"When they snatched me, yeah. Couple hours ago, I guess. The flash bulb went off and blinded me for a second like it always does, and I seemed to be falling. Then I was here. Only I still don't even know where here is. Do you? How come we don't weigh nothing? It's ghastly!"

"We're in a space ship," Wayne told her. "In free fall, circling earth a thousand miles or so out. I thought you at least knew we were in a space ship."

The girl said, "Oh, bull. We can't be in no space ship. How'd we get here so fast?"

"They have a matter transmitter, but I haven't the slightest idea of how it works. Obviously it's limited to living creatures or they could just as well have taken whatever it is they want instead of . . . You don't

happen to know what a high dragon bump is, do you?"

"Don't be dumb. Of course I . . . well, unless it's a dance or something. I use to be a dancer, ya know. Sort of."

"With bubbles, I imagine," Wayne said.

"Tassles. They was my specialty. But there's more money in posing for pitchers, and the work ain't quite so—"

"I doubt that a high dragon bump is a dance," Wayne said.

Then he rubbed his chin. High dragon bump? Bumps and grinds? Highland fling? Chinese dragon dances? Hell, why not?

The idea of space travelers visiting earth to learn a new dance was no more fantastic than the idea of them being here at all.

Wayne turned his face to the door and shouted, "Hey, is that it? A dance? You want us to teach you a dance called the high dragon bump?"

A muffled metallic voice from the other side said, "Nod danz. Bump. Huguff quig."

Wayne shrugged and grinned weakly at Sheilah. "Well, we're making headway. We know one thing that it isn't."

The girl had drifted so close to him now that he could feel the warmth of her body and smell the overwhelming fragrance of her perfume.

She put one hand on his arm, and Wayne found that he had neither the strength nor the inclination to jerk away.

But he protested weakly, "Now, listen, there's no point in you—I

mean—even if we did, I couldn't produce a high dragon bump."

"What kind of work do you do, mister?" Sheilah asked softly, drawing herself even closer. "You know, you ain't even told me your name yet."

"It's Wayne," he said, fumbling in an effort to loosen his tie so he could breathe more easily. "I'm an instructor. I teach physics at Kyler College, and I've got a weekly science show on TV. In fact I'd just finished my show when they got me. I was leaving the studio, starting down the stairs. Thought at first I'd missed a step and was falling, but I just kept falling. And I landed here, and . . . Now, don't do that!"

"Why, I wasn't doing nothing. Whaddya do on your TV show?"

"I talk. About science. Physics. Like today, I was discussing the H-bomb. How it works, you know, and why the fallout is dangerous, and . . . Oh, good Gawd! Seduce, reduce! High dragon bump!"

He shoved her away from him abruptly and violently and he went hurtling in the opposite direction.

"Well, hey!" Sheilah protested. "You don't need to get so rough. I wasn't going to—"

"Shut up," Wayne said. "I think I've figured out what the Cirissins want!"

"Hey! Hey, open the door," he shouted. "I've got to talk to you."

The door opened and a Cirissin floated in.

Sheilah turned her head away, shuddering, and Wayne found it wise to close his eyes and open them little by little to grow reac-

customed to the sight gradually.

The only thing he could think of with which to compare the Cirissins was the intestinal complex of an anemic elephant.

It was not an entirely satisfactory comparison; but then, from his point of view, the Cirissins were entirely unsatisfactory creatures.

Each of the four he had seen was nearly twice his size. They had no recognizable features such as eyes, ears, nose, head, arms or legs.

Tentacle-like protrusions of various size and length seemed to serve as the sensory and prehensile organs. Wayne had identified one waving, restless flexible stalk as the eye. He suspected another of being the mouth, except that it apparently wasn't used for talking. The voice came from somewhere deep inside the convoluted mass of pastel streaked tissue.

"Wand tog?" the Cirissin rumbled.

Wayne said, "Yes. Do you mind telling me what you want a high dragon bump *for*?"

"Blast away hearth," the Cirissin replied unhesitatingly.

Wayne swallowed and found it unnaturally difficult to do so.

"To blast away earth?" he said. "You can do that with just one high dragon bump?"

"Certificate. Alteration energy maguntoot. Compiled, though. Want splain?"

Wayne said, "Never mind. I believe you. Just tell me this: Why? Who do you feel it's necessary to do it?"

"Cause *is* necessary," the Cirissin explained. "Hearth no good. Whee

dun lake. Godda gut red oft."

Sheilah gasped, "Why the inhuman beasts!"

Wayne expended one sidelong silencing glance on her and then said, "I see. And just suppose now that I don't give you a high dragon bump? What do you do then?"

"Use hot tummy ache your arnium fishing bumps. Got them us elves. Tooking longthier, more hurtful, but can. Few don't gives high dragon bump tweddy far whores, thin godda."

Wayne was silent for a while, staring at the alien creature, aware of Sheilah staring at him.

"Twenty-four hours," he muttered. "Then they use uranium fission bombs. Oh, hell!"

Finally he shrugged. "All right, I'll do it. Anyway, I'll try. I'll do what I can."

Sheilah said, "Hey, listen mister, you can't . . ."

"Shut up!" Wayne snapped. "How do you know what I can do? You just let me handle this."

"No sea juicing?" the Cirissin asked, waving his eye stem at Sheilah.

"No. No sea juicing, and no torch hair either, please. I just didn't understand what you wanted at first. Now, if I could talk to your captain—or, are you the captain?"

The Cirissin replied, "I spoke man. Name Orealgrailbliqu. Capitate nod sparking merry can languish. I only earning languish. Gut, hah? Tree whacks."

"Uh, yeah, very good indeed," Wayne said. "And in only three weeks! Now, Mr.—you don't mind if I call you O'Reilly, do you? Well,

then, O'Reilly, do you have any suggestions as to how I should go about getting you a high dragon bump? You want me to make you one? Or—"

"Yukon Mike?" O'Reilly asked.

Wayne shrugged modestly. "Of course. With proper materials and equipment—and enough time." He wondered if there was any chance at all of convincing O'Reilly of that.

"Nod mush timeless," O'Reilly said doubtfully. "God gut lab tarry, few wand lug."

Wayne hesitated, partly to translate O'Reilly's rumblings and partly to marvel at an audacious idea taking shape in his mind.

He said, "Uh, yes, by all means. I do want to look at your laboratory. Let's go."

The Cirissin offered no objections to Sheilah accompanying them, so they followed him, pulling themselves along the tubular corridor by means of metal rings set in the walls, apparently for that specific purpose.

It was the same means of propulsion employed by their guide, except that he used tentacles instead of hands.

They were more awkward than he, and so they fell behind.

"Listen, mister," Sheilah said. "You're not really gonna help these creeps, are ya? Cause, I mean, if you are I'm gonna stop you—one way or another."

Wayne looked at her, feeling a deep sadness that anything so gorgeous could be so stupid. Stirred to self-consciousness by her near-nudity, he glanced quickly away.

"Why don't you quit trying to think?" he advised her. "I may not be able to make a high dragon bump, but so help me I'm going to do my damndest to see that they get one. And don't you get any stupid patriotic ideas. You just keep out of it. Understand?"

O'Reilly had thrown open a door and was waiting for them.

Wayne looked inside.

"Smatter? Dun lake lab tarry?" the Cirissin asked after waiting nearly a minute for some comment.

The laboratory probably wasn't adequate to produce a hydrogen bomb, Wayne realized; but he wasn't at all sure. It was the most complex, complete and compact laboratory he had ever seen. Its sheer size forced him to revise upward his estimate of the overall size of the ship.

Much of the equipment was totally alien to him, but there was also a great deal that he could at least guess the purpose of. Including a fabulous array of electronic equipment.

When Wayne still didn't say anything, the Cirissin closed the door. "Batter blan," he announced. "Wheeze india buck terth. Cup girlish ear. Torch herf youdon brink high dragon bump."

Wayne said, "Huh?"

"Flow me." O'Reilly led Wayne and Sheilah through a maze of corridors, tunnels and hatchways, stopping at last to throw open a door and let Wayne peer into the control cabin of a miniature space ship.

O'Reilly jumbingly explained that it was a reconnaissance ship,

used for visiting the surface of a planet when it was impractical to land the mother ship.

The control board was simple: a few dials, one or two buttons, several switches and a viewplate. It looked too simple.

Wayne said, "Now, wait. Let's see if I have this straight. You want me to take this ship to earth and swipe you a high dragon bump. And you're going to keep Sheilah here and torture her if I don't deliver the goods, huh?"

The Cirissin said that was right. "Kwiger butter. Jus bush piggest putton. Token ley tours gutther."

"I see. And what about communications?" Wayne asked. "Is the boat equipped with radio? How can I let you know when I have your high dragon bump?"

O'Reilly said, "Can't. Combundleations Cirissin only."

From his further explanation Wayne gathered that communications between the two ships was on the basis of some sort of amplified brain waves, and could carry only the brain waves of Cirissins.

Wayne considered the situation.

Two hours to get to earth. No radio. The big Cirissin ship was circling earth at an unknown distance, unknown speed and unknown direction. And although the ship was enormous, it would be impossible to spot it from earth unless you knew exactly where to look.

He said, "It would really be better, wouldn't it, if I could make the high dragon bump right here?"

O'Reilly agreed that it would be better.

"Well, let me try. You've got a

good lab, and we have plenty of time. Twenty-four hours, you said? Well, give me about ten hours in the laboratory. If I can't produce a high dragon bump in that time I'll take the small ship down and get you one. Okay?"

While the Cirissin thought it over in meditative silence Wayne was aware of Sheilah watching him with cold, hostile eyes. He wished he could explain things to her, but he didn't dare try.

Finally O'Reilly said, "Hokum. Tenners in lab. Thistle."

"It'll be enough," Wayne assured him.

SHEILAH was taken back to the room where Wayne had met her and the Cirissin instructed her to stay there. He closed the door but did not lock it. Then he took Wayne back to the lab.

"Neediest hulp?" he asked.

"Hulp? Help? Uh . . . Why, no. No thanks. I can manage fine by myself. In fact I'd rather work alone. Fewer distractions the better, you know."

"Hack saw lent. Wheel buzzy preparation. In trol room few deriding hulp needed." Then O'Reilly floated out the door.

Wayne was astounded. He'd taken it for granted that the Cirissin would insist on supervising him, and he'd been evolving elaborate plans for escaping his attention.

But Wayne thought he had the explanation for the Cirissins' idiotic behavior.

This ship and everything about it indicated an extremely high in-

telligence and an advanced culture.

Everything, that is, but the Cirissins themselves.

The idea of kidnaping him from earth to provide them with a weapon to destroy earth; kidnaping Sheilah to seduce him; the idea of even expecting him to be *able* to produce such a weapon—it was all idiotic.

There was only one explanation that he could see.

The Cirissins *were* idiots.

Some other race had produced this ship. These cosmic degenerates had somehow gotten hold of it and were on a mad binge through the universe, destroying all the worlds they didn't like.

He wondered how many they'd already wiped out. They had to be stopped.

Wayne immediately started constructing a radio transmitter from convenient materials in the laboratory. It was fairly simple.

He was not interrupted for nearly two hours. At which time he was saying into his improvised microphone:

"Seven hours? That long? Can't make it any sooner than that? Five hours? Six?"

And then it was not a Cirissin voice behind him which said: "Drop that. Put up your hands and turn around!"

It was Sheilah.

Wayne turned and saw her floating at the doorway pointing a long, tubular metal object at him, her finger poised on a protruding lever.

"What's that?" Wayne asked.

Sheilah said, "It's a gun I found after lookin' all over the damn ship.

I'm going to kill you. And then I'm going to kill your Cirissin friends. You're nothing but a dirty traitor, and I wouldn't seduce you if—I never did trust you scientists. Maybe I'll be killed, too, but I don't care." She was close to tears.

"You're going to kill me?" Wayne said. "With that? How do you know it's even a gun? Looks more like a fire extinguisher to me. Aw, you poor little imbecile, I haven't had a chance to explain yet, but—"

Sheilah said, "You make me sick." She pulled the trigger.

The object was not a fire extinguisher, after all. It was quite obviously a weapon of some kind.

Also it seemed obvious that Sheilah had been pointing the wrong end of the weapon toward Wayne.

One more obvious fact that Wayne had time to comprehend was that the weapon was not a recoilless type.

But by then Sheilah had gone limp and the gun had rebounded from her grasp and was sailing at Wayne's head.

He ducked but not fast enough. The object whacked him solidly on top of his head.

His brain exploded into a display of dazzling lights, excruciating pain and deafening noise.

Then the lights went out and a long, dense silence set in.

When Wayne fought through the layers of renewed pain and opened his eyes, he was still floating near his makeshift radio equipment in the laboratory.

Sheilah still hung limply in mid-

air near the door. The tubular weapon wavered near the ceiling. The radio transmitter was still open.

It was just as though he'd been unconscious no more than a few minutes. But Wayne had a strong feeling that it had been more than that.

Therefore he was only shocked, rather than stunned, when a glance at his wristwatch indicated six hours and forty minutes had elapsed.

He held his head tightly in both hands to keep it from flying off in all directions at once, and he tried to think.

He knew it was important to think—fast and straight.

Six hours and forty minutes.

That was too long to be unconscious from a simple blow on the head, and his head didn't really hurt that bad.

Probably the weapon had still been firing whatever mysterious ammunition it used when it struck him; and when it bounced off his head it had turned, and he'd been caught in its blast.

But that didn't matter. That wasn't the important thing.

Six hours and forty minutes he'd been out.

Seven hours!

The Defense Department official he'd spoken to had told him seven hours.

And thank God it wasn't five hours or six, as he'd been urging them to make it.

Anyway he had only twenty minutes now. Possibly a little more, but just as likely less.

That realization should have spurred him to instantaneous and heroic action, but instead it paralyzed him for several minutes. He couldn't think what to do. He couldn't get his muscles and nerves functioning and coordinated.

The absence of gravity didn't help. He thrashed about futilely.

But at last, almost by accident, his feet touched a metal support beam, and he pushed himself toward Sheilah. He grabbed her around the waist with one arm and with his free hand pulled both of them through the door.

It seemed a long, long time before he got Sheilah to the reconnaissance ship. By then the twenty minutes were up. His life was going into overtime.

Sheilah was conscious but still disorganized and limp, struggling weakly and ineffectually. Wayne fumbled with the door, got it open and shoved her inside.

Then he pulled himself in and closed the door.

They might make it yet. They still had a chance.

He studied the control board, deciding on the proper button to push.

From behind him Sheilah screamed, "The bomb! You've got the bomb and you're going to— Well, you're not!"

Her body slammed against his shoulders and her arms encircled his neck. Her fingers clawed at his eyes.

Wayne struggled, not to free himself, but only to get one hand loose, to reach the control board. When he did get a hand free, they had floated too far from the controls.

"Stop it, you stupid bitch!" Wayne snarled. "You're going to kill us both!"

Wayne said, "Listen, there's a guided missile from earth heading straight for this ship, and it has a hydrogen bomb warhead. It'll get here any minute now and when it—"

His words were broken off by the tremendous roar and concussion of the hydrogen bomb.

Wayne's last thought before oblivion swallowed him was that they wouldn't have had time to escape, anyway.

But that wasn't the end. Wayne woke up enough to refuse to believe he was alive, and O'Reilly was somewhere near, telling him:

"Cirissins full of grate your forts. Radio eggulant blan. Thankel normous. Rid of earth now. Blasted away. Givish *good* high dragon bump. Yukon gome now."

Wayne groaned. The meaning of O'Reilly's words was trying to get through to his brain, and he was trying desperately to keep the meaning out.

O'Reilly's voice receded into a thick gray fog. "Keep shib. Shores. Presirent felpings. Gluck."

Metal slammed against metal. Wayne slammed against something hard. And darkness closed in once again.

But this time it wasn't so smothering and didn't last nearly so long.

When he opened his eyes his head was clear. He wasn't floating. He was lying on something hard—a floor surface of the Cirissin landing ship. He didn't ache anywhere.

All in all he felt pretty good.

For the first few seconds.

Then he started remembering things, and he wished he hadn't bothered to wake up.

Sheilah was standing by the control panel, her back to him. She blocked the view screen, but Wayne didn't want to see it anyway. He wasn't even curious.

Sheilah turned, saw him, smiled broadly.

She said, "Gee, mister, I guess you're a hero. I dunno how you done it, but you made 'em go away, and you made 'em turn us loose." Wayne could detect no mockery or bitterness in her voice.

"Aw, shut up," he growled.

"You still mad at me cause of what I done? Well, gee, I'm sorry. I didn't get whatcha were up to. I guess I still don't, but . . . Oh, hell, let's don't fight about it. It don't matter now, does it?"

Wayne shook his head wearily. "No," he agreed. "It doesn't matter now."

Sheilah moved away from the control board and came toward him. In her filmy, transparent costume, she was the quintessence of womanly allure.

Wayne gasped and stared, but not at her.

The view screen had become visible when she'd moved.

It showed earth.

Or a curved, cloud-veiled slice of earth. Intact, serene and growing steadily larger.

"What the hell! Why, I thought . . ." Wayne jumped to his feet, brushed past Sheilah and peered more closely at the view plate. There was no mistaking it. Earth.

"What's a matter with you, mister?" Sheilah asked.

Wayne felt dizzy. O'Reilly had said, "Earth blasted away," hadn't he? And the H-bomb hadn't destroyed the Cirissin ship. Therefore . . . Well, therefore what?

In the first place what O'Reilly had actually said was, "Rid of earth now. Blasted away." It wasn't quite the same as . . .

O'Reilly had never said anything about *destroying* earth.

Quite a sizeable re-evaluation project was taking place in Wayne's mind. It took several minutes for all the pieces to fall into their proper places. But once he was willing to realize that the Cirissins had known what they were doing, everything seemed obvious.

"Oh, good Gawd!" he muttered. "What utter idiots!"

"The Cirissins?" Sheilah asked.

"No, I mean us. Me. Good Lord, just because O'Reilly's English wasn't perfect! What did I expect for only three weeks? Hummm. The atomic structure of the entire ship must be uniformly charged to . . . Damn! High dragon bump!"

"I don't getcha," Sheilah said. "What's with this high dragon bump business? I thought they wanted a hydrogen bomb to destroy earth, and I thought you'd agreed to help 'em, and so I thought . . ."

"Oh, never mind," Wayne said. "I know what you thought, and you weren't any more stupid than I was. We were both wrong."

"Look, the Cirissins must have been stalled—out of gas, sort of. Something had gone wrong with their nuclear drive units. They had some emergency fuel, but they didn't want to use it. Like having a can of kerosene in the car when the tank runs dry, I suppose. It will work, but it messes up the engine. You understand so far?"

"Sure."

"Okay then. They happened to be close to earth, so they went into an orbit around it and studied it for a while on radio and TV bands, and realized they might be able to get help without using their emergency fuel—uranium, incidentally, not kerosene."

"So they grabbed us. Me, I suppose because they'd seen my TV science program. They must have gotten the idea from some stupid spy show that scientists have to be seduced into revealing information. That's why they picked up you."

Sheilah interrupted, "But what did they *want*? I thought . . ."

Patently, Wayne said, "Just what they said. A high dragon bump. A *bump*, not a bomb. A boost, a push. Not to blast away earth, but to blast away *from* earth. That's all."

END

The scientific humanist doesn't pretend that every experience of life can be forced into a test tube or that every interest can be weighed on scales. He knows that something in everything always escapes the technique of measurement.

—Max Otto

What Is Your Science I. Q.?

THE WIDE, wide world in all its aspects. Score yourself 5 for each correct answer. Eighty or more makes you a galactic of some standing. Answers on page 120.

1. Which of the following is secreted by the salivary glands: crepsin, ptyalin, pepsin?
2. What does parabolic velocity mean?
3. What is the chief difference between algae and fungi?
4. What part of the brain serves as the pathway for impulses from the brain to the spinal cord?
5. How do protozoa reproduce?
6. What is a Robinson Cup?
7. Which of the following refers to rare earths: actinide series, lanthanide series?
8. What would a magnitude of -15 indicate about a star?
9. What is paedogenesis?
10. What have fibrinogen and thrombin in common?
11. What is the Fitzgerald effect?
12. Which undergoes a greater expansion due to a one degree rise in temperature, silver or zinc?
13. What is the magnitude of the faintest star still visible to the naked eye?
14. What is a Guyot?
15. Which radioactive rays can have their direction most definitely changed by a magnetic field?
16. Cumulonimbus clouds indicate what sort of weather?
17. Moving bodies on the Earth's surface are deflected in which direction north of the equator?
18. A man weighing 170 pounds would weigh how much under the pressure of 2 gravities?
19. What is the name of the South Pole star?
20. What is a meson?

GIFT HORSE

(Continued from page 47)

There is no return—at least, not for us. There are too few of us, and too many of the robots, and they know too much and are too strong. Our children, or their children, may figure out a way to persuade or force the Central Intelligence to build another *Gift Horse* and to send her back in Time, as our *Gift Horse* was sent.

But will they want to?

Because we are no longer a poverty-stricken bunch on Dunsinane. We live better than lords ever lived. Many of our contemporaries, in our own time, would have envied us.

It's just that at night when we look up to the sky, to the black sky with those pitifully few, faint stars like candles going out one by one in the windy dark, we feel so damned lonely. **END**

DO UNTO OTHERS

(Continued from page 65)

"They returned our visit, and what did they find? What kind of a pestilent horror did we live in? Bare ground, teeming with life, billions of life forms in every cubic foot of ground beneath our feet. Above the ground, too. Raw, growing life all around us, towering over us.

"If they were doomed to live in such a world, they would want it covered in salt, to kill all the life, make it antiseptic. They owed nothing to the rest of Earth, but

they owed this kindness to you. They did unto others, as they would have others do unto them."

"I never realized—I was sure I couldn't be . . . I've built my life around it," she said.

"I know," I said with a regretful sigh. "So many people have."

And yet, I still wonder if it might not have happened at all—if I hadn't winked. I wonder if that pesty psychiatrist has been right, all along? **END**

SERVICE WITH A SMILE

(Continued from page 86)

"That's well and good," agreed Marguerite, "but we have to agree that no one of us will be favored above the others. He has to understand that from the start."

"That's fair," said Alice, pursing her lips. "Yes, that's fair. But I agree with Marguerite: he must be divided equally among the four of us."

Chattering over the details, the hard competitiveness vanished from

their tones, the four left the sick-room to prepare supper.

After supper they went back in.

Herbert stood by the bed, the eternal smile of service on his metal face. As always, Herbert had not required a direct command to accede to their wishes.

The man was divided into four quarters, one for each of them. It was a very neat surgical job. **END**



Wings of clay may be the answer to problems of high-speed aviation of the future. Engineers at the University of California at Los Angeles have designed and tested ceramic wings under simulated flight loads and results indicate that ceramic materials can withstand the high temperatures created by aerodynamic heating. Use of tension cables in prestressing the ceramics overcomes the brittle quality which would make such wings seem unfeasible.

A mirror system developed by the Libbey-Owen-Ford Glass company is the key to a new landing system for aircraft carriers. Using a curved mirror about four by four feet mounted on an automatic stabilizing frame, and four bright lights which are beamed into the mirror to form an optical glide beam for the pilot, the new system gives a pilot 20 seconds instead of the usual three or four to position his aircraft correctly.

A radio pill that can be swallowed by a patient and then tuned in by doctors as it broadcasts information from the stomach has been perfected by R. C. A. The tiny transmitter once in the intestinal tract

can send out information on pressure, temperature and chemical changes. To pick up the internal broadcast, a doctor uses an X-ray machine or a small tuned antenna close by the body.

A plan to erect a 600 foot high skyport, supported by three glass-clad towers, in central London has been revealed. Considered the answer to requirements for the year 2000, the cloverleaf platform with three sections will provide space for handling 24 aircraft per hour. The three shafts, supporting the platform section, consist of finned structural drums encased in outer cylinders of glass, behind which high speed elevators will operate.

A new dieting drug that does not make the user nervous or jumpy is something that should interest those trying to lose a few pounds. It is an appetite-depressant called Levonor, claimed to have absolutely no side effects. Exhibited recently to the American Medical Association, its great advantage was described as having no stimulating effect on the nervous system, diminishes hunger without cutting it out completely, is inexpensive, and can be used by virtually all dieters.

This month in Brussels, Belgium, marks the opening of the first World's Fair in nearly 20 years. Emphasis will be on science and its peaceful uses. Dominating the entire fair grounds will be a giant, 360-foot structure called The Atomium. Shaped to resemble the arrangement of atoms in an elemen-

tary crystal of metal, the Atomium will symbolize the Brussel's Fair much the way the Trylon and Perisphere did the last World's Fair in New York in 1939. The 500 acres of Heysel Park, four miles from the center of the city, will house the exhibits of 48 nations.

A new electric typewriter, with a ten-key companion keyboard, has just been announced by IBM. It has a magnetic core "memory" and can be programmed to automatically retain and type out gross sales, compute taxes, miscellaneous charges, invoice totals, add, subtract, multiply, extend, hold in "memory" for later processing, etc.

Simplicity of operation is the keynote in a new electric eye, 8mm motion picture camera developed by Bell & Howell. It has a lens that opens or closes automatically according to the brightness of the light in which it is being used. For example, in bright sunlight the camera lens closes to restrict the amount of light entering the camera; in dull light, the lens opens. In automatic operation, the lens is instantly set for correct exposure, as the camera is aimed at its subject, activated by a photocell that converts solar or light energy to mechanical energy to open or close the lens.

A tiny tube the size of a cigarette filter tip that shows how long a radio, TV picture tube or other electronic device has been operating has been developed by Raytheon. The timer weighs less than one-

sixth of an ounce, and runs on about the same amount of energy generated by a flea. It is completely self-sealed and impervious to surrounding conditions, can operate immersed in liquid and in any position and works equally well in hot or cold temperatures. It is so small and light that it can be used in individual sections of a large complex electronic system. Simple to install and much cheaper than mechanical timing devices, the new timer could save millions of dollars on jet precision bombers, motor bearings, heater elements, TV transmitters, electronic computers and mobile radio car fleets.

Blood-letting, the medieval practice of draining off various amounts of the body's vital fluid will soon be back in style, but for newer and more scientific reasons. Plasmapheresis, a type of blood-letting where the whole blood is removed, divorced from its plasma content, and then immediately put back into the donor, has dramatically opened new opportunities for the treatment of disease as well as the stockpiling of valuable plasma for emergencies. A pint of blood is removed each time and put into a centrifuge that separates the red blood cells from the plasma. The plasma is taken off for other uses and the red cells are back in the body in 21 minutes. In cases of poisoning the toxic substances can be removed from the blood much more quickly than by an artificial kidney; plasma taken from immune donors can be used to control diseases such as diphtheria, tetanus, etc. in other persons.

hue AND cry

Mr. Barnhart, in your December issue, deprecates the methods—or lack of methodology—employed by science fiction writers when dealing with the problem of space travel. The factors of the problem are the old familiar ones of space (or distance), time, and velocity, inherent to the action of travel. The apparent stumbling block involved in problems where distance is astronomical is the Einsteinian axiom that: “when v approaches the value of c then the increase of mass becomes very great, reaching infinity when v becomes the speed of light. As infinite mass offers infinite resistance, then no body can travel with the speed of light.”

The above is elementary, and so is the obvious reluctance of most students to heed the asterisk that usually follows the above statement and requests the reader to *see appendix*. In the appendix we find the

statement concerning increase of mass in ratio to velocity, slightly expanded: “a body moving with the velocity v , which absorbs an amount of energy, in the form of radiation without suffering an alteration in velocity in the process, has, as a consequence, its energy increased etc.—the increased energy, of course, becomes an increase in the inertial mass of the given body.

Here we see that the increase in mass is caused by the *absorption of radiation*; and, it would be a logical process, within the realm of matter-of-fact knowledge, to have the inferred space ship radiation-repulsant (or proof), thus eliminating, or greatly decreasing, the need for author-magic. The ship might even be able to absorb *controlled* amounts of radiation and use the radiation for fuel!—the more speed, the more available fuel; the more fuel, the more speed, etc. Simply put (if it already hasn't been), if the ship does not absorb radiation, it does not increase its mass; and if mass is not increased there is no limit put to its speed by a non-existing increase in mass.

Purely speaking, velocity has no “body”, and cannot impart that which it does not have. Velocity is an “action” of bodies, not a body in itself!—and I, for one, wish velocity would cease assuming status to which it has no claim.

Even with speeds in excess of light achieved by *relatively* logical methods, I suppose that some authors will still insist upon the “mystic” confusion of the perceived image with the real object—the ship arrives before it starts; or, the

same ship (traveling at excess light speeds) is *seen* to land twice, and, so, becomes twins. Such a ship in landing would, of course, have to decrease speed and its secondary outsped image might catch up with its primary. Even if it did not, and the ship had outdistanced its "light image" by any desired amount of time, the secondary image would still cease to exist at the point where the ship decreased its speed to less than light. An object is an object, and its image is an image; and it is not a theoretical necessity that they have temporal and spacial simultaneity. This separation does not in the least affect the matter-of-fact premise that one is the real object and the other is merely its image!—we are all familiar with the phrase *series of images*, and do not confuse object with image.

We accept the cause of a sound (supersonic jet) passing us before the effect (sound) come tagging along. Is it so much more difficult to accept the cause of an image (speed-of-light ship) passing us sometime before the outsped, light-perceptible image of the ship comes along. And *must* we then say that both were objects, instead of object and belated image?

Comes to mind that we would have here the separation of a trilogy that by custom and inference have always (prior to super sonic) been "reasoned" as going together. The reasoning is, of course (good old, Hume), based on nothing but custom. In excess-light speeds we would have, first, the unperceived, real object; then the perceptible

image; and then, much, much later, the sound.

—Bryden Pearce
Carmel, California

I am a housewife and an incurable reader. I discovered science fiction about five years ago and have been an addict ever since.

As for covers and illustrations—the cover on a magazine doesn't sell me, but a list of the authors does. When I buy a science fiction magazine I always turn to the table of contents.

I enjoy most of the top flight authors . . . I enjoy two types of science fiction stories especially, the believable adventure stories . . . and the humanist type plots which point out the road ahead to anyone who will see.

I do *not* enjoy the pseudo-technical mishmash, even if I am convinced that the author knows what he is writing about. I do not know what heparin's function to the human body is, or have any knowledge of a cepheid star . . .

Oh, before I close, I have one pet peeve. I *loathe* and *detest* the growing habit of coining new words from perfectly good old ones. Mag for magazine, Ugh!—and fanzine—I won't even tell you my opinion of that horror!

—Thelma Bartleson
Tacoma, Washington

Mr. Riley has again stirred us with the humanistic implications of incipient scientific achievements. In this aspect of his writing his work

is distinctive because it challenges us to creative contemplation of ethical and philosophical frontiers of life. With *A Question of Identity* (April IF) he raises two rather fundamental problems for the future.

The first question is essentially forensic and although it is postulated for the future it has dramatic meaning for today. While he has not specifically demanded an answer to the problem, it is implicit in his story. Psychological research into conditioning factors that are responsible for aberrant behavior has long since indicated that many individuals have had such a traumatic and painful psychogenic background that criminal behavior is a natural response on their parts. If a father and a mother have raised a child in such an atmosphere of frustration and denial that catastrophic hostility characterises the child when grown, there is a very profound question as to where responsibility lies when that individual commits a felony. The law, which grew up under a different understanding of human nature, takes no account of the destruction of moral qualities or emotional sensitivities.

It is true that if it can be proved that a man is insane at the time a crime is committed, he is not held responsible. But the psychologist knows that a man may have an intellectual awareness that something is wrong and still have such a powerful compulsion that his ethical awareness is nothing compared to the overwhelming force of his emotional drive. But here the law says

he was sane and he must pay the price. And if one follows out the reasonable inferences of a psychological understanding of crime it renders a code of law essentially based on retaliation senseless and archaic. It is this assumption which lies behind the changing concept of law enforcement which emphasizes therapy rather than punishment. But when it comes to the more violent forms of crime, society lapses back to its primitive penology, an "eye for an eye".

The second question has to do with the nature of man. Of course the question raised by the defense attorney, "What is man?", has been raised by every philosopher and every spiritual leader. Mr. Riley gives the question a little different twist by making the question referable to physiological transformations which today seem plausible. New discoveries in the functions of certain cells in the nervous column of the spine indicate that these cells "think" and the gradient in psychological thinking is to abandon the term psycho-somatic because of the dualism involved.

Today, mind and body are thought to be so inextricably intertwined that such a term does violence to the reality of the process. If then personality is essentially a product of the interaction of one entity (mind-body), with other persons and with nature it is certainly true that radical alterations of the hormonal, neurological or physical characteristics of a person could produce a new and unique person. But this is not so unique. Endocrinologists and psychiatrists have

been doing this for years. The question remains as to the identity of the resultant personality. I have personally watched individuals with the characteristics of one sex and the feelings of the other changed by hormone therapy and operations so that their appearances came to be better aligned with their feelings. They had previously played the role of men and came now to play the role of women, or vice versa. In many cases they do not assume they are the same person because they change their name as well as their total pattern of life.

To bring Mr. Riley's question down to the present is permissible in this case. Suppose Mrs. "X" commits a crime just before she undergoes a series of transformations from which she emerges as Mr. "X". Would the court or would society feel that Mr. "X" is responsible for a crime Mrs. "X" perpetrated? But the question has much more grave implications for the religious philosopher. We know that many so-called "conversions" are spurious, but we also know that in some cases the Christian goal of a "new-born" personality is true. These that are truly "saved" abandon completely their previous tendencies towards crime, their bad habits of life, and take on by identification a new personality. Is this the same person? Forensically "yes" and the law has always held that this is true, but the total change may be as remarkable as in the case Mr. Riley hypothesizes resulted from physical and psychological therapy.

Finally, one must ask what is the

essential aspect of personality then? What is this "soul" that Mr. Riley mentions? It would be fascinating to draw out the implications of his story for that concept but we can only suggest here that the thoughtful reader will do that himself.

—Dr. James A. Peterson
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dr. Peterson is Marriage Counselor at the University of Southern California and author of the text book "Education for Marriage".

Since you are curious about your readers—I'm a schoolteacher—high school English—and can add that a few high school students like science fiction; it's a natural part of my business to inquire into their reading preferences. However, in my observations, they are in the minority. Most consider the vocabulary too difficult; of those who do not, many have other tastes; and there just can't be overlooked the matter of the typical science fiction magazine cover and its effect on any normal parent who doesn't read science fiction.

It gives me an impression that your readers, unless exceptional, start at or beyond college age. My son Mike, and occasionally some of his friends, read my copies and more of their own. He's twenty, has long been fond of space opera if full of action . . . but is apparently developing discrimination. He is an Air Force jet mechanic, or something like that. There seem to be a lot of science fiction readers among the real life space cadets.

You seem equipped to please a

wide variety of readers, so why should you care? Your stories are generally well written, often beyond praise, and at the same time have color, action, freshness.

About "John Sentry"—he can't be using a penname as an absolute disguise—or you wouldn't mention it at all. He can't be using it because of another story in the same issue, surely—imagination boggles over a supposition that Nourse, Clarke, or Asimov would write a story that way.

Your quiz feature raises interesting questions but why the title? Doesn't fit. Intelligence tests aren't valid unless the population has equal learning opportunity, whereas in science it would take myriad lifetimes. Some other title would be more attractive and sound less foolish, wouldn't it?

—Alma Hill
Fort Kent, Maine

I don't think you knew what you were asking for when you wrote in your February editorial, "The byline John Sentry on this issue's *The Barbarians* is a pen name for what well known science-fiction author?" As the editor of a science-fiction magazine, you should know that some fans will take the greatest pains to discover which author is behind a pen name. I don't know if I should be proud of it or not, but I am one of these fans. Looking into my files, I found three stories by John Sentry, and all three magazines shared one other author, the prolific Isaac Asimov. I therefore conclude that John Sentry is a named used by Isaac Asimov for his second story in

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the same issue of a magazine. Am I right?

—Leslie Gerber
Brooklyn, New York

Wrong . . . But luckily, a postcard from Mr. Gerber caught us before this went to press, and he has now succeeded in tracking down the true identity of "Mr. Sentry".

I was a little distressed with the editorial in the February, 1958 issue, and can only hope that it was written too soon after Sputnik for you to have regained your equilibrium.

As a matter of fact, one of the things that has made us the laughing-stock of the world in recent months is the poor sportsmanship with which we've taken our licking in the satellite field. You say, ". . . the Russians rushed their satellite into space not so much for benefit of the IGY as for propaganda."

That's not so at all. The Russians announced they would send up satellites just as we did. Months before the hoisting of Sputnik they announced the approximate time of launching and described the characteristics of Sputnik. We didn't pay

any attention to that because until October 4 we never paid attention to the Russians as far as science was concerned.

And the Sputniks have proven of great value to the IGY. Our own Smithsonian Observatory in Cambridge has collected enough data to keep it busy for years. Drs. Hynek and Whipple, who head it, say that the Soviets have kept all their agreements as far as sharing information was concerned.

To be sure, the Russian politicians have used the Sputnik for their own propagandistic purposes,—but what do you expect? When we had a monopoly on the A-bomb, we used that for all it was worth, propaganda-wise.

I sincerely hope that we end by sending up a better satellite ourselves, but we'll do that only by buckling down to work and not by belittling the competition. Now isn't that so?

—Isaac Asimov
West Newton, Mass.

No sooner said than done!

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ANSWERS: 1—Ptyalin. 2—Speed acquired by a body falling sunward from an infinite distance. 3—Algae contain chlorophyll. 4—Medulla oblongata. 5—Fission, conjugation, spores, budding. 6—Anemometer. 7—Lanthanide. 8—A supernova. 9—Production of offspring by larval forms. 10—Both concerned with clotting of blood. 11—Length of a body contracts as speed increases. 12—Zinc. 13—Sixth. 14—Underwater mountain in the Pacific Ocean. 15—Beta. 16—Thunderstorms. 17—Right. 18—340 lbs. 19—Sigma Octantis. 20—Nuclear particle between a electron and a proton.

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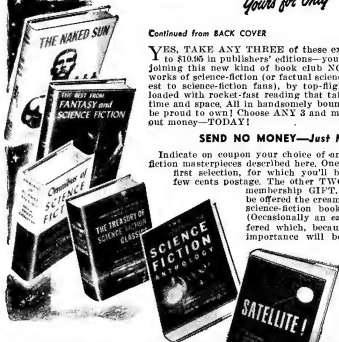
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